THE STORY UPON A HILL

The Puritan Myth in Contemporary American Fiction

CHRISTOPHER LEISE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS
TUSCALOOSA

The University of Alabama Press
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0380
uapress.ua.edu

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Typeface: Garamond

Cover design: David Nees

A revised version of chapter 4 appeared as "'Presto Change-o! Tyrone Slothrop's English Again!' Puritan Conversion, Imperfect Assurance, and the Salvific Sloth in *Gravity's Rainbow*." In *Pynchon Notes* 56–57 (Spring–Fall 2009): 127–43.

A revised version of chapter 5 appeared as "'That Little Incandescence': Reading the Fragmentary and John Calvin in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*." In *Studies in the Novel* 41.3 (Fall 2009): 348–67.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Leise, Christopher, 1978–author.
Title: The story upon a hill : the Puritan myth in contemporary / American fiction / Christopher Leise.
Description: Tuscaloosa : University Alabama Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016052376 | ISBN 9780817319472 (hardback) | ISBN 9780817391232 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: American fiction—20th century—History and criticism. | American fiction—21st century—History and criticism. | Puritans in literature. | Puritans—United States—Influence. | Christianity and literature—United States. | National characteristics, American, in literature. | BISAC: LITERARY CRITICISM / American / General. | RELIGION / Christianity / Protestant.
Classification: LCC PS374.P8 L45 2017 | DDC 813/.5409—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016052376

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Because Anne Bradstreet's friends regarded her poems so highly, a loved one allegedly swiped a collection from her and spirited the manuscript off to London, where it was prepared for publication. Amused or bemused or both upon seeing it published, Bradstreet aided in the production of a second edition, this time featuring "The Author to Her Book"; one of her most enduring poems, it artfully and humbly details her discomfort with sending her work off into the world as one does a child.

I have no such artifact to repay the world its efforts in helping see this book into print, though the number of names to follow must exceed the twenty-five lines of verse with which Bradstreet graced her community as well as posterity. Without the extraordinary instruction of G. Thomas Couser, James Berger, Alice Levine, and John Bryant at Hofstra University, admission into graduate school would surely have eluded me. David Schmid took up my feeble cause as a master's student at the State University of New York at Buffalo; Robert Daly, Joseph Conte, and Christina Milletti (each in his or her own way) helped me learn to read and write with the same sense of generosity that they embodied. Scott Manning Stevens taught me the profession as he gave me his friendship. As a cohort, Michael C. Clody, Joseph Zeccardi, Hilda Ma, Maya Mathur, Mary Foltz, Angela Szczepaniak, Kevin Pelletier, Jeffrey Sirkin, and Marcus Marenda inspired by their examples of thorough and rigorous thinking. Matthew Klane survived the experience of my learning to play the guitar as an adult, even as I failed to learn how to sing well. Michael Rozendal saved my life on a remote Scottish hillside, or so that's how I tell it. With each iteration, that rock face grows by a story or two.

Stumbling through my early career, Kathryn Hume taught me the value of clear prose and the means to achieve it. Along with Kit, Alex Mueller buoyed my spirits as I developed a spine—both the one that runs through this book as well the one that kept me upright as the vicissitudes of publication often weighed me down. Jeffrey Severs set a bar for accomplishment, one which I'm eager to clear. Crystal Alberts and Birger Vanwesenbeeck made great teammates as we braved our first effort at book preparation together.

The English Department at Plattsburgh State University deserves special thanks, particularly Tom Morrissey, Jose Torres-Padilla, Jon Chatlos, and Tracie Guzzio. They took my appeal for the professoriate seriously and kept my academic career alive. Likewise, the Department of English at Whitman College helped me secure a tenured position, without which there would have been no time to finish my book. Theresa M. DiPasquale and Adam Gordon, as well as Patrick Frierson in Philosophy and Dennis Crockett in Art History, took time to offer invaluable insights.

At each stage in my development, institutions as well as individuals provided critical support. The Office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at SUNY-Buffalo encouraged the early stages of this work with a significant fellowship. Whitman College's various means of supporting student-faculty research interaction also helped immeasurably. Much of my introduction issued from field research conducted with Rose Woodbury in Boston and Salem, sponsored by a Louis B. Perry Summer Research Award. Along with the input of its many great students, the college's generous Aid for Student Instructional Development ensured I was never without means to proceed as a teacher and a scholar. This would never have been possible without Lisa Perfetti's outstanding advice.

The University of Alabama Press worked diligently and considerately to whip this book into shape. Daniel Waterman cheered me on while Joanna Jacobs and Jonathan Pattishall kindly helped clear up my writing and keep it consistent. At all times, their staff exhibited the highest levels of professionalism and made reassuring what can be a stressful experience.

As for my family, Richard and June Leise are as patient and understanding as one could ever imagine. Believe me, I tried them on both fronts; no matter what I threw at them, their support never wavered. My brother, Rich, also took the time to read and help improve this manuscript with his novelist's eye. In the end, though, I cannot but dedicate this book to the lives it has plagued the most—Jennifer, Eleanor, Felix, and Margot have endured far more than their fair share of impromptu and uninvited lectures, whether they were on historical tourism, inaccurate infotainment programming, how lousy I think colonial New Englanders were, how much I love colonial New Englanders and their remarkable history, how aggravated I get when I hear the word "Puritan," and so on. They also counterbalanced my occasional lapses into desolation as the New York Football Giants consistently blew fourth-quarter leads. I can only hope they love me with as much abandon and joy as I love them.

THE STORY UPON A HILL

INTRODUCTION

SALEM AND THE SELLING OF AMERICAN SELFHOOD

America teaches its children that every passion can be transmuted into an occasion to buy.
—John Updike, *The Witches of Eastwick*

In 2012, Kraft Foods launched an advertising campaign for its Miracle Whip brand that drew heavily from America's complex nostalgia for some things Puritan. One television spot featured characters that could be easily associated with *The Scarlet Letter*: a woman, garbed in period dress, wears on her bosom a bright red, interlaced *MW* logo. For viewers even vaguely familiar with Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the Hester Prynne send-up evoked a sense of individualist rectitude in the face of unreasoned community pressure. As a stand-alone, the Kraft ad might not have said much, but its Salem Witch Panic sequel made the first spot even more remarkable. This second installment featured an angry mob descending on a convincing replica of a late seventeenth-century home, bearing pitchforks and torches and demanding that a preteen girl hand over her beloved condiment. The girl replies to the tortured faux-English accents of the Whip-hunters in a strikingly modern American English voice; against their irrational accusations, the child appears wise beyond her years and her era. In tandem with the *Scarlet Letter* rip-off, her insouciance speaks to the state of how New England is popularly represented in post-World War II America: "The Puritans" are a remarkably versatile brand from America's past, a package that bundles together content that can be alternately priggish and progressive, ancient and modern, oppressive and protodemocratic.

Like all historical entities, New England's nonconforming Christians are available for differing interpretations, and have been so across several generations. But I contend that the Puritan brand is, at its core, unique: when thinking about "Puritans," assessments of New England's colonial history often move at warp speed from fifteenth-century liturgical debates, through early nineteenth-century American national narratives, and into twentieth-century intellectual

analyses. The first Miracle Whip ad draws as much on tropes from Hawthorne's narrative as it does from the so-called Antinomian Controversy that inspired his novel, while the subsequent Salem ad carries a Hawthornian trace of the first. What an angry villager indicts as "the foul, unholy beast" is obviously such because of its "red markings," which are the same as the scarlet letters of the first TV spot. Thus they demonstrate that the contemporary moment's Puritan is a blended product of Hawthorne's generation, not just of the seventeenth century from which Hawthorne's and his peers' interpretations are drawn. In these cases, "Puritanism" is less a name for New English Congregationalist Christianity than it is a reading of northeastern colonial history. That reading, I contend, speeds across the span of the Reformation to the present, in a process moving so fast—like Saturn's rings—as to appear fixed and stable.

Slowing the reading process down, as Kathleen Donegan demonstrates, permits distinctive "critical interventions into received ideas about colonial history." She explains, "Slow movement allows one to linger in . . . the strange, the inchoate" and to apprehend "the disorderly" in colonial texts (15). Admittedly, my mode of reading differs from hers—Donegan reads colonial primary sources whereas this book's attention remains mostly directed to modern and contemporary American novelists. These writers at times anticipated and at others participated in the redirecting of attention to the granular bits of history that too often get blurred into layers of narrative sediment; they work to slow the process by which their readers connect the name "Puritan" with a single coherent meaning. Throughout this book, I hope to add to the ongoing conversation in early American and nineteenth-century literary studies that contests two hundred years of conventional wisdom about a New England populated almost exclusively by "Puritans," particularly Puritans sharing an exaggerated like-mindedness—a historical gloss that was once mistakenly held as "the most coherent and most powerful single factor in the early history of America" (Miller, *New England Mind* viii).

In referring to historical persons and groups studied herein, I prefer the adjective phrase "New English"—emphasizing their status as an ethnic people—rather than the more common "New England," which has the effect of conflating a place with only one (overly specific and exclusive) identity category. I also call them Congregationalists, nonconformists, and similar descriptors. The terms "Puritan" and "Puritanism" refer to a real and operative concept: that is, those words signify the consolidated analysis of early America performed by subsequent generations. But a "Puritanism" defining all New England does

not take into account the extent to which New English Calvinists disagreed with one another. Worse yet, equating early New England only with an illusory American Puritanism ignores the presence of indigenous Americans and Africans in the New World and downplays the influence of such presences on Protestant presumptions about meaning and truth. Throughout, I capitalize the *p* in "Puritan" when referring to the branded American concept, except when writing about puritanisms in England or when quoting scholars who prefer the lowercase.

Tying the whole of New England to only one understanding of the region's evolving intellectual traditions whitewashes the past: too much of "American literature" is thereby defined as white people's writing, while the rest becomes "multiethnic." Notably, the *Scarlet Letter*-themed Miracle Whip ad takes place in a grass-covered clearing, occupied entirely by white spectators. Salem in the 1640s, by contrast, was surrounded by indigenous American communities; as Jared Hickman indicates, preachers at the time expounded the correctness of their religion against the forbidding darkness of New English slaves and the threatening recesses of the forest frontier. Mary Beth Norton similarly demonstrates how Salem's Panic-era Christians so deeply feared the region's Native population that Samuel Parris's sermons and George Burroughs's biography came to take on a distinctively racialized character. We thus cannot understand New England as a space that merely restaged extant English ways of seeing and explaining the world; rather, New English thought arose as a response to its new neighbors and environment, just as American Indian and Africanist thinking adjusted to the changing realities of globalization. As Hickman puts it, "modernity . . . was produced by the global cultural encounters that began most conspicuously in 1492 out of the dialogue—albeit often unequal . . . —between Europeans and non-Europeans. When globality is asserted as the defining condition of modernity, any representation of modernity as a primarily European phenomenon is exposed as both tendentiously ideological and methodologically untenable" (146).

In implicit and explicit ways, many of America's most significant postwar authors work to correct (by complicating) the modern myth of Puritanism. Borrowing from Susan Howe's aim in her remarkable essay collection *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*, I hope to aid with efforts to unsettle the Puritan—particularly as popularly understood—in American fiction. Doing so serves the function of importing significant developments in colonial history into the vibrant intersection of religious intellectual

history and literary studies. It calls New English colonialism back into its moment, before its plurality was approximated into "Puritanism," and it reenergizes the diachronic dynamism that makes the evolution of America's early Protestantisms a process, not a static and uniform thing. Unsettling the Puritans has become a political act on the order of Rancière's definition—that is to say, it makes intelligible hitherto meaningless noise, revealing it as the voices of nondominant agents in the *demos*. One such voice is said to have set off America's most famous witch panic.

AESTHETIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

In front of the institution whose promotional brochures claim the status of "Salem's Most Visited Museum" stands a bronze statue of Roger Conant. Atop an enormous boulder at the center of a three-way intersection, on a kind of island at the northern edge of downtown, the life-size image of Salem's English founder gazes into the distance at an obtuse angle to the Salem Witch Museum. In a stylishly archaic font, the plaque on its plinth boasts, "I was a means, through grace assisting me, to stop the flight of those few that were here before me, and that by my utter denial to go away with them, who would have gone either for England, or mostly for Virginia." Draped in a heavy cloak and topped with the steeple-crowned hat that is a signature of male New Englanders' garb, Conant subtly both owns and denies his Englishness (and, via Virginia, Anglicanism) as the ground of his identity.

Conant's statue and its message stand dwarfed, physically and rhetorically, in comparison to the massive face of Salem's first witch museum. The Salem witch-tourism industry works to reinforce specific narratives of America's lurching emergence from ostensibly English and Puritan origins into its modern, "secular" national character. Tropes shared by Salem's entertainment "museums" also reveal how anachronistic narratives about race are inscribed from the contemporary moment into the past and thus naturalized in a murkier time, when thinking about "race" was just beginning to essentialize differences between the New World's human bodies.[1] Salem's emphasis on the sensational elements of Puritan history effectively buries the lede of its historical narrative beneath a relatively minor aberration: while one year's panic, paranoia, and internecine conflict captures so much tourist attention, Conant's statuary story—that the Christian God's grace endorsed and assisted in the displacement of indigenous Americans, as well as the enslavement of black Africans—should serve as a reminder that New England is the seat of transfer from Old

England's providential historiography into more modern ideological presumptions like American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny.[2]

The Salem Witch Museum's dramatic edifice exemplifies how the coastal Massachusetts city's tourist trade distorts known facts about the now infamous period—sometimes opportunistically and sometimes accidentally. Its elaborate faux-Tudor church façade hangs on what is otherwise a nondescript, retail-style brick building. Complete with symmetrical towers framing a pointed-arch door, the Witch Museum's entrance centers on a massive pointed-arch window with ornate casements that would ordinarily hold stained glass, but which instead encase a plain scarlet backdrop: an apt color choice, both for its allusion to Hawthorne's fictionalized New English history and for its striking creepiness. Although this façade is in no way as ornate as St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle (where the decapitated corpse of Charles I, a victim of the English Puritan insurrection, is interred), its resplendence would have caused any New English Congregationalist to shudder at the failures of Anglicanism to break completely from the Catholic Church's ritual, polity, and aesthetics.

Such inconsistencies are immaterial to a Salem experience that demonstrates little concern for being historically accurate; the gloomy, post-Gothic Tudor style is far spookier than the spare, straight lines of an actual colonial New England meetinghouse. The museum's outward decor underscores how the industry representing Salem's past as "Puritan" has grounded its imagery not in fact, but in intended affect. This is a form of "thanatourism," after all.[3] People come to Salem for a scary exploration of a historical mystery, and that is indeed what many of the city's attractions aspire to provide.[4] Such abuses of the past for profit are not unique to the Salem Witch Museum or to the city of Salem itself, but since almost all the tours available to a visitor begin or end (or both) in a gift shop, it becomes clear that edification is secondary to the town's commercial commitments.

Salem's consumerist appropriation of New English history matters because how Puritanism is understood plays such a crucial role in the mythology that underpins America's self-conception.[5] Tracy Fessenden has recently spelled out the centrality of Protestant belief in putatively "secular" elements of American society, arguing that "particular forms of Protestantism emerged as an 'unmarked category' in American religious and literary history," to the effect that "a particular strain of post-Protestant secularism, often blind to its own exclusions, became normative for understanding that history" (6). Despite her incisive analysis, Fessenden grounds her critique on the concept of the Puritan

without explicitly challenging the idea of Puritanism as a settled interpretation of early New English history. New England as populated mostly by a definable "Puritan" Christianity is one narrative out of many, too frequently foreclosed, possibilities for understanding a broad group of peoples across decades. In fact, no one we would call a "Puritan" called himself by that name until very late in the seventeenth century. To a very real extent, therefore, there were no "Puritans" in America until people started claiming the term as a benign descriptor of the past during the eighteenth century: that is, after the original "errand into the wilderness" had become something else.

Doubtless, the term helps make a kind of sense of the wildly disputatious lot of colonists in the area now called New England. Yet "under the banner 'Puritan,'" Sarah Rivett points out, one can find "Anabaptists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Anglicans, and in the wake of the Wesleys and Whitefield one even occasionally finds a Methodist" (401). Though rarely discussed, some of these self-styled "hot Protestants" even emigrated to American soil prior to Plymouth's establishment. It is not until the eighteenth century, with theocratic enterprises rapidly fading in New England, that usage moved to a more ambivalent register.

The process by which the "Puritan" label's denotation changes in US discourse remains hitherto unexplained; to the best extent I can determine, it maintained its invective force in England's American colonies—"injuriously" and "opprobriously," as William Bradford himself indicated (7)—from the Virginia colony's establishment through the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, outlets like the *New York Times* continue to raise questions like "Are Americans Still Puritan?" in their Op-Ed pages, and then answer in the affirmative (Hutson SR4). Why, as America becomes increasingly pluralized, does so much political discourse retrench to tropes of national identity that should evoke as much shame in America's early history as they do pride and wonder? Why should it be that, after decades of Modernists working to "make it new!," the people called Puritans return with increasing frequency as a literary theme for renegotiation from the Cold War through to the present? My short answer is that the Puritan narrative has been posited, time and again, as an American origin because origins are necessary to the production of an essence. In turn, national unity requires essences; to borrow from Benedict Anderson, these essences make up part of the imaginary shared by the larger US community. If American identity is to exist as an object of contemplation—if, indeed, something is to bind together this whole nation in its broadly diverse

disorder—then that thing under consideration must come from somewhere (and some time). A people handpicked by the universe's one, all-powerful God to lead the world is probably the most idealized essence a nation can make for itself, especially when that people has neither an ancestral land nor a single language to make it cohere.

To claim that the people now called Puritans are the origin for the United States' national character is to say that they were the first real Americans, and that all the rest follow from these primary people. Primacy, then, is not defined by "firstness" in historical sequence: for before Plymouth, before Virginia, before English fishermen and Martin Frobisher, came the Spanish and even Norse colonizers, as well as the American Indians populating the land from time immemorial. We cannot understand the Puritans as "first Americans" until there is a category of "Americans" through which we can see, say, Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson as essentially of the same order. The colonies' revolution against the Crown was not inevitable, though the common narrative treats it as such; the emergence of modern America from archaic English colonialism may feel like the development of a genetically predetermined trait, but that is simply not the case.

SERIAL AMERICANNESS

In this book, I hope to highlight historians' observations regarding how, after America's birth as a nation, highly influential writers and political figures seized on the notion of a unified Puritanism to substantiate claims of inheritance to "Americanness" over other potential pretenders to the seat of authenticity. Moreover, this process of judging, which Gilles Deleuze identifies as the Platonic motivation (and the core of Christian thinking), works in the service of distinguishing essence from appearance. The greater a claim to Puritan lineage, therefore, the more "American" a person or group appears to be.[6] Hence the contemporary moment's distinctions between a person's belonging to and in America become a matter of degrees, a noticable development from the Protestant (American)/Papist (alien) binary astutely identified by Jenny Franchot in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nor does our current moment propound an American/un-American binary like the one Walter Benn Michaels finds in the literature of US modernism throughout his compelling book *Our America*. Populist political thinking, I hope to show, seems to have absorbed postmodernism's rejection of post-Enlightenment binarisms in favor of relativist comparisons—suggesting that the relationship between literary and public

discourse has shifted considerably from the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries.

In line with Franchot, Fessenden rightly identifies how the modern sense of US democratic inclusiveness troublingly assumes Protestant values as universals. In so assuming, the appearance of inclusiveness thereby leaves alternatives incorporated only in a marginal way; a more sensitive approach to the past would redirect readers to alternate ideas of America's origins. Currently, the settled interpretation of New England as Puritan takes the place of a founding myth—on the one hand, it acts as a model against which claimants to Americanness are judged; at the same time, it is a retrodiction, an interpretation from the present that gets injected into that past to validate certain suitors' claims to Americanness. Recognizing how this process works makes plain that the center of American identity moves as authors and orators develop the capacity to retell stories—particularly about "Puritanness"—and get people to listen. For the moment, the purveyors of the Puritan myth serve as both judge and jury in the court of appeals to American identity.

Tourism in Salem offers insight into the United States' process of distilling an idealist self-image by rejecting the intolerance and myopia of a small number of extremists while celebrating other, preferred qualities. So purged, New England's history can operate as the birthplace of the modern Republic. The popular legacy of Puritanism resonates uneasily with many of America's most important postwar fiction writers; this is so for at least two highly significant reasons. For one, the rise of Christian conservatism renewed national attention to narratives, trumpeted by figures such as Newt Gingrich, that placed the Pilgrims and Puritans as "first" Americans.[7] The implications of this are stunning: consider that Edmund Morgan barely mentions "A Modell of Christian Charity" in his 1958 biography of John Winthrop; yet after John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan brought the "city upon a hill" trope into the center of American political rhetoric, Morgan praised the sermon for "represent[ting] the ideal by which the later actuality is measured or the key by which to explain the sense of mission that engaged first New England and then later the United States" ("Wider Context" 145). Morgan made this claim despite knowing full well that the provenance of the sermon attributed to Winthrop remains uncertain and its rhetorical form was common fare for leaders of perilous ocean-crossing expeditions.[8] A more recent biography by Francis Bremer boldly proclaims that Winthrop is "America's First Founding Father": indeed, Bremer cannot resist the impulse to fictionalize an account of the sermon's delivery. His little contribution to the

mythology, Bremer concedes, "is but a guess" as to what transpired (174).

Many great contemporary American novels display an interest in the Puritan origin myth, mirroring the myth's evolution in national electoral politics and popular culture. The empty character of the Puritan brand is as much an opportunity as it is a problem for contemporary writers. If it can mean anything, then these writers can make it mean other things than the exclusionary and delimiting ideal often invoked in its name; they can also powerfully reinvent seventeenth-century literary forms.

I am not alone in questioning the centrality of New England in the story of the United States' national development out of its sundry colonial parts; to date, however, few scholars have brought this line of inquiry to bear on modern and contemporary fiction. In what follows, I trace a line of literary resistance to the Puritan origin myth from the mid-twentieth century forward, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of those resistance efforts, and suggest a possible (if optimistic) future for how contemporary discourse might move beyond the notion that America's begats begin in the northeastern section of the New World. Though necessarily incomplete, I hope *The Story upon a Hill* will further stimulate conversations about why such a diverse array of contemporary writers might find colonial New England a fascinating site of consideration and contest.

MAKING PURITANS AGAINST DIFFERENCE

Wondering why America's origin narratives focus somewhat on Virginia but primarily on Massachusetts—failing to consider New York City—Thomas Bender compellingly argues that New England is defined through its negations of things with which it is thought to have disagreed. Like New England, Jefferson's pastoral Virginia excludes the possibility of real alterity; New York City's inherent difference from the rest of that nation, he concludes, thus makes it an unusable origin, even though Dutch colonists arrived in Manhattan in 1614, prior to colonization by the English at Plymouth and Boston. "The Puritans envisioned a single moral community, one that acknowledged no distinction between private and public values" (430): or so, Bender remarks, the story goes. John Winthrop's definition of liberty as "that which is only good, just, honest" (Winthrop, qtd. in Bender 430), he explains, was "something to be defined by the consensus of the community" (430). Yet the colonial New England town's unity has long been known to be mythical.[9]

So too did persecution of the uninitiated recur with disturbing frequency. Bender points out that "the dark side of the New England communal ideal

is intolerance, as many a seventeenth-century New England Quaker accused of witchcraft learned. Otherness is a problem for such communities; difference becomes indistinguishable from subversion" (430). The myth of America's Puritan origin, he shows, contradicts the melting pot narrative American schoolchildren often learn; nevertheless, it remains a mainstay of American conversations about national identity. To Bender, I would add that the Puritan myth supports a kind of apophatic nationalism, permitting America to suppress conversations about positive self-identification by instead relying on its ad hoc series of negations. Franchot demonstrates how Catholics served as a negative reference point in early and nineteenth-century America's strategies of controlling otherness, arguing that "a rhetoric of theological attack can twist from enemy back to self and . . . a religious zone like popery . . . is made to contain the contaminated, the exotic, and the fearful" (xx). She later clarifies how from these attacks "antebellum New England efforts forged a national identity that was not only oppositional but even 'negative' in its essence" (5). By insisting on what she calls an "attraction of repulsion," Franchot emphasizes how Protestantism's very closeness with Catholicism—in genealogy as well as in aspects of belief—ironically sets Catholics in a privileged rhetorical space.[10]

Franchot sets up antebellum anti- and pro-Catholic discourse as equal partners with race in the production of American identity, arguing that the contrast unifies Protestantism within "the vague contours of humanistic freedom" (9). Elizabeth Fenton, on the other hand, deploys a classic deconstructive move to complicate the consolidated Protestantism that Franchot puts forth, "posit[ing] anti-Catholicism as a marker of the mutually constitutive relationship between these ostensibly binary positions" (Fenton 7). While Franchot and Fenton differ as to the nature of the emergent American self (relatively exclusive or inclusive of difference, respectively), for both thinkers Catholicism provides an ocean against which Protestantism defines its shore. Catholicism may not be correct, by this logic, but it is a religion. Indirectly, Toni Wall Jaudon recognizes the profundity of the hierarchizing process that results from such discourse: Protestants cannot simply dismiss Catholicism as religion, whereas creolized Africanists' spiritual practices can be explained away in "secular" terms (717). The attempt to expel Native American and emergent African diasporic belief systems from the domain of the religious unveils the degree to which Protestants accept Catholics as more alike than different.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, increasingly, scholars as well as artists demonstrate a keen awareness that "religion" as a category does not

export well beyond a Euro-American Christendom (Kaufmann 34).[11] Here, I follow Jared Hickman's lead in pushing conversations about the development of American epistemology back to early imperial encounters with non-Europeans. Hickman persuasively contends that English thought could not survive the encounter wholly intact; instead, New World exchanges forced European migrants to devise new ways of thinking—the operative force in this account being indigenous thinking circulating via globalism. As examples, he offers "both an über-canonical European poem like John Milton's 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity,' which (somewhat ambivalently) prophesies from the stable in Bethlehem the eclipse of the pagan gods, and an obscure colonial anecdote detailing the native chieftain Hatuey's deicidal resolve to protect his people from the rapacious Spaniards by throwing their 'great god,' gold, 'into a great river nearby' (that is, killing the Spaniards' god before the Spaniards could 'kill [them] in order to get their hands on Him [the god, gold]')." In these examples Hickman sees "a metanarrative structure—call it a distinctive genre of political theology whose premise is the fluidity rather than solidity of the cosmic-political order—that has decisively shaped racial discourse" (148). Moreover, he points out, the arrival of Europeans and the expansion of travel throughout Africa forced non-European thought systems to account for those ideas that were new to colonial powers. From this *frisson* emerge multiple modernities; "progress" is not a direct and uninterrupted injection from Europe to its outside, but a dialogical process of exchange. Thus it is one thing for a Protestant mentality (whatever one conceives such to be) to form itself over and against a known Catholicism. Posing the known as the principal threat to a people distracts from the infinitude of the unknown, whether Native cosmologies, Africanist traditions, or Buddhist philosophies theorizing nothing instead of Christendom's totality. Less familiar "others" reside at a greater distance from the hegemonic philosophical positions than do the known: both Fenton and Franchot underscore how close, indeed, Catholicism sits to Protestantism. Postwar fiction permits more alien epistemologies to stand as challenges to the dominant Protestant paradigm in and on their own terms, be those epistemologies temporally far removed (like early Christian history in William Gaddis), spatially far removed (like Africanist and American Indian thought in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Charles Johnson's novels), or conceptually impossible (like the wisdom of Vonnegut's imaginary Tralfamadorians).

ABSENT MEMORIALIZING

Salem's profitable historiography offers a distinctive perspective on how

contemporary ideological transmission (which Fessenden might identify as "post-Protestant") can happen in an alarming manner, while revealing the processes by which Puritan myths situate Protestantism's "others" in a series of stratified, subordinated relationships within the idea of America. Just outside one of Salem's largest parking facilities sits a former armory that now houses a beautifully designed and maintained US National Park Service visitor center, which helps orient visitors to the citywide Salem Maritime National Historic Site. Scores of pamphlets, books, and tourist guides are available inside; most are free. At no point is an effort made to distinguish between those attractions that are for-profit and those that are not. Many of the institutions claiming "museum" status are variations on wax-figure displays and/or haunted houses and do not appear to keep current with changes in the historiography of the events they purport to explain, yet their promotional publications stand undifferentiated in the visitor center from attractions that favor confirmable historical details over sensationalism.

Because Salem's purportedly legitimate site of mourning and reclamation was erected to satisfy consumers disappointed by the insufficiently solemn kitsch, the city seems to stand apart from similar American tourist towns that deliberately obscure the relationship between history and fiction. The city's prominent Witch Trials Memorial embodies most concretely the complicated relationship between the city of Salem's colonial history and its commercial present. Installed in 1992 at the tercentennial of the witch hysteria, it is a public garden space adjacent to the city's oldest graveyard. At first glance, the area impresses the viewer as a sincere effort to deal with the legacy of the persecuted in the serious manner such injustices demand.

Described as "the first real space in the City of Salem where the tourist can go to gain an authentic historic encounter," Judith Wasserman (an apologist for the site) contends that "the design and construction of the Salem Tercentennial offers a rebuttal to crass tourism. And instead of the 'selling' of Salem, it offers understanding, in a metaphoric and mythic way, so that the events which transpired in 1692 live today. Through subtle use of rocks, trees, and text, historic authenticity was designed into Salem, Massachusetts" (10). Yet Wasserman herself cannot ignore the absence of authenticity at the core of the Salem tourism experience. She notes the essential problem indicated by a pair of signs adorning the Salem Witch Dungeon Museum. The larger of the two is a heavy bronze marker, carefully wrought and apparently mounted with bolts, that reads:

THE WITCH GAOL
—
HERE STOOD THE SALEM WITCH GAOL
BUILT IN 1664, USED UNTIL 1813
RAZED IN 1957
—
DURING THE WITCHCRAFT
PERSECUTION OF 1692, MANY
OF THE ACCUSED WERE
IMPRISONED HERE. ONE OF
THEM, THE AGED GILES
COREY (b. 1611), WAS PRESSED
TO DEATH ON THESE GROUNDS

At its base, this sign claims "History happened here," grounding its legitimacy in the power of place.

A second sign simultaneously undermines that implicit assertion. About an inch offset to the left, a small black plastic rectangle of the variety that might say, "This is not an entrance," reads:

THIS PLACQUE WAS ORIGINALLY
LOCATED ON FEDERAL STREET
THE OLD JAIL SITE
TWO BLOCKS NORTH

These signs inadvertently indicate the sad but telling fact that almost all the history ostensibly told by Salem's tourist industry is displaced. While many of the accused witches were imprisoned in the town, and those executed died at or near Salem's Gallows Hill, most of the events that we think of when we talk about Salem transpired in nearby Danvers, the area that in 1692 was called "Salem Village and the Salem Farms."[12] The accusations spilled out into neighboring villages like Beverly, Topsfield, and Andover. Though some of the trials were held in what was then known as Salem Town, most of the drama played itself out in the surrounding countryside. All but one of the significant buildings that remain from these events stand far outside the city of Salem, and even the extant one (the Jonathan Corwin house) was displaced some hundred feet from its original location to widen one of Salem's busiest intersections.[13] The city's assertions of its centrality within the world of the witch panic are grounded more in its name than in the events that name might signify; its privileged relationship to the witchcraft phenomenon follows more from later developments (like key infrastructure and zoning decisions) than from the events themselves.

Danvers, lacking sufficient parking and bereft of the retail storefronts that house many of the "museums" and shops at Salem's core, simply cannot serve as an attractor to so many weekenders. Nor is it likely that Danvers residents, who mostly comprise an affluent community, would enjoy the increased automobile and pedestrian traffic.

The "Witch Gaol" signs on the wall of the Witch Dungeon Museum produce what Wasserman calls a "false sight," directing the visitor's gaze—past replica stocks, that staple of "Puritan" public punishment, in which one can comfortably pose for photographs—to something that is not only no longer there, but never stood in the site the signs both claim and disclaim. They point merely to an ordinary street. There, in the depths of the dungeon itself (or at least the very loosely re-created version thereof), is the attraction's one claim to authenticity: an actual beam from the long-gone prison.[14] Or a fragment of one, anyway, though it does feature a plaque attesting to its authenticity. The Witch Dungeon Museum builds outward from the smallest fragment of Salem's history to a grand narrative of America's coming-of-age. Seen a certain way, the Salem Panic is that last moment of Puritanism's extreme credulity, when archaic Calvinist superstition finally gave over to its partly secularized husk that is America's pragmatic Protestant work ethic. The Salem hysteria can be that moment that allows the tourist to reject the extremist aspects of Puritan religious belief while valorizing its liberal potential.

Salem's Witch Dungeon Museum, like its counterpart the Salem Witch Museum, borrows from the architectural aesthetics of the long ago to induce a frightened response in the viewer.[15] Its exterior style is in this case faux-domestic Tudor, not the church-Tudor of the Witch Museum. To the inattentive eye, it looks of the period of the witch trials. I emphasize this point because the Witch *History* Museum (the third witch "museum" discussed in this paragraph; admittedly, they can be hard to keep track of) features a poster-sized photograph of the Witch Dungeon Museum in an array of artificially aged photographic images of otherwise authentic locales. Among images of numerous other places where witch-trial activity did in fact take place hangs a sepia-toned print of this nonsite, undifferentiated from real locales, offering the form of credibility to the Witch Dungeon Museum without the content. The caption beneath the photograph reads simply "Witch Dungeon (Lynde St., Salem Towne)," neglecting even to mention that the site claims to be a museum, let alone that it is a replica of the authentic jail that no longer exists.

In a strange way, the "authenticity" of the Witch Dungeon Museum is

propped up by the Witch History Museum's semiotics. Recall from the signs on the Witch Dungeon Museum's edifice (just barely visible in the aforementioned photograph) that the original jail site was at Federal Street and not Lynde Street. Yet the caption does assert that Lynde is in "Salem Towne," leaning on both colonial-period orthography—the silent letter on the sign—and geographic distinction (the differentiation of Salem Town from the Village or Farms was moot by 1757, when Danvers was incorporated as an independent municipality from Salem) to lend a kind of credence to a destination that has no historical connection to the witch-trials period.

This process, where the tourist's gaze is referred to a site by one sign and then that gaze is deflected by two other signs, makes Salem a hybrid of theme park and historical fiction, less a site of "authentic" history than a simulacrum that harnesses the power of historical tragedy.[16] Think again of the Witch Trials Memorial, adjacent to the Peabody-Essex Museum and contiguous with the burial place of some of the famed Mather family. Designed as a space that legitimates the otherwise exploitive experience of Salem's thanatourism, this destination aspires to provide a space for an appropriate affective response (Wasserman 2).

Like the Witch Dungeon Museum and the Salem Witch Museum that came before it—and that caused the problems the memorial purportedly resolves—the Witch Trials Memorial also does not proceed forward from fact or artifact to experience, but instead moves backward from its intended emotional effect on the viewer to an "appropriate" form of representation. The city of Salem wanted a solemn space that satisfied the desire for reverence, so it sponsored a competition for designs that would elicit that somber, reflective response. This works in contrast to, say, Gettysburg, which requires little ornamentation or augmentation to inspire gravitas. Commoditizing tragedy in the manner of Salem has led to a kind of centripetal historicism, the production of an artificial middle that tries to concentrate the whole of eastern Massachusetts's witch history into a few city blocks. Such a move synecdochically figures the whole of discourse about "Puritanism," as I argue in the following chapter: the concept of "Puritan orthodoxy" is an approximated center that cannot be located at any specific place within a religious belief system. In this case, as with the many museums, the memorial is not history; it is the anchor holding Salem in its false place-ness and that offers authenticity without sending visitors past the shops and restaurants of Salem to Danvers.

Neither is "Puritanism" a religion. Rather, it is a concept that binds variants of Calvinist Christianity to a "habit of mind" that supposedly encapsulates the

whole of New English thought. Perry Miller's foreword to the second printing of *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* makes no apologies for doing just that. "I have taken the liberty of treating the whole literature as though it were the product of a single intelligence, and I have appropriated illustrations from whichever authors happen to express a point most conveniently" (vii). To do so, Miller must rely on Charles Morton's thinking while excluding Thomas Morton's and Mary Dyer's; nor does this single intelligence admit Roger Williams (though he established his own New English colony) owing to the fact that he was "altogether too gifted with imagination" (259). Miller's herculean efforts to defend a central New England intelligence ultimately produces an overly coherent idea of Americanness that both preserves and improves upon its English inheritance.

Salem purports to offer a glimpse into that mind at work. At issue here is something of an ontological question: what is Salem? I am reluctant to call the witchcraft attractions "history," if history is understood both as the events that happened in the past and an attempt to make sense of that past in a narrative form.[17] By and large, the witch-related tourist attractions deal accurately enough with certain facts—as accurately, say, as do recent Salem novels like Kathleen Kent's *The Heretic's Daughter* or Frances Hill's *Deliverance from Evil*. Yet the tourist attractions rarely seek to fully explain the past: more to the point, the fear (and thus the fun) issues from the attractions' ability to forestall conclusions, to resist explanation, to conceal what are historians' admittedly and rightly complex efforts to make sense of this past.

The witchcraft elements of the Salem tourist attractions ape the conventions of historiographical representation. They are narrative and they appeal to established (and verifiable) facts. Yet throughout, Salem tourism invokes a contemporary sense of both race and nation that was not yet established in 1692 in the terms they are understood today. Much of the tourism industry in Salem follows Arthur Miller in connecting the 1692 crisis to McCarthy-era anticommunist "witch hunting," deliberately highlighting how "primitive" elements of America's past beyond which Americans hope to have progressed (and which have been repressed) can flare up and drive society to inexplicable extremes of suspicion and intolerance.

When Witch Panic-era "Puritans" are depicted absent an updated narrative about the past, the signifying power of this crucial episode becomes problematically fixed into a mere semblance of the known. History (as a discipline) cannot speak authoritatively to what Salem often represents as fact. In contrast to the

nearby "living history" Plimoth Plantation or Danvers's Rebecca Nurse Homestead, both of which blend simulation and artifact so skillfully as to produce meaningful descriptions (if not explanations) of New England's early colonizers, Salem's brand of commercial tourism makes a mere silhouette out of colonial Massachusetts's inhabitants. Onto that outline, tourists can project their modern selves and produce a sense of an original American character, partly by claiming a singular, English point of origin.[18] This is possible only, I contend, precisely because Salem's past is illusory—in fact, the seventeenth century there is engineered and constructed in the present with each tourist's visit. At the same time, the "American" is positioned to reject that which is other. Yes, the modern American can recoil at the average colonists' intolerance and naive credulity toward the supernatural, claiming "progress" beyond certain elements of that primitive cosmology. More subtly, though, the ur-American is fashioned in contradistinction to the female slave of unknown ethnicity who is often blamed for precipitating the crisis to begin with: the Parris family's slave Tituba.

The generic Salem narrative holds that Tituba was a black woman from Barbados who shared the secrets of her voodoo practice to help a few young girls from Salem Village divine the future. Among those girls were cohabitants of the beleaguered minister Samuel Parris, who interpreted Tituba's non-English spiritualism as witchcraft and saw the young girls' mysterious fits as the work of the devil. Tituba, beaten into confessing, named a few of the Salem area's already-accused oddball characters as fellow witches so she would avoid death by hanging, lighting the flames of fear and suspicion that would consume the winter, spring, and summer of 1692.

In fact, Tituba's racial and ethnic identity is unknown and unknowable; with little documentary evidence about her, all we can say with certainty is that she came to New England with Parris and was sold off to different owners after the trials.[19] Efforts to "fix" her race may strike recent scholars as foolish, but they seem necessary to the tourist trade. While the center of this historical mystery is (in a certain sense) modern America's originary self—European contact with a woman who is likely, in contemporary language, "mixed race" and who is both indigenous and global—Tituba is not presented as a mystery. She is repeatedly represented as not American inasmuch as she is assuredly not Puritan, a pagan black/Africanist islander amid a cast of Christian Englishmen.

Tituba's radical otherness lies neither in being black nor being Indian but rather in her being undermarked in the historical record and thus unclassifiable according to our modern taxonomies of selfhood. Nevertheless, the tourist

industry seems committed, through repetition, to determing Tituba's race as black with African origins.[20] In seeking out an American identity, the thanatourist needs both a self (self-governing English colonists, "freemen" who owned property) and something excluded from that (Afro-Caribbean slave woman who was owned) to produce what Wolfgang Iser might call a "blank" in which the field of "Americanness" can be engendered. In Salem, the Puritans' race is rarely, if ever, posited; whiteness as Englishness is a given, a field of identity that is produced in contradistinction to the black slave Tituba and the neighboring Indians who threatened the town's security.

The American seeking out an identity by visiting this place works much like the New English project itself: rather than making assertions of identicality to some stable essence, Americanness constructs itself by disclaiming specific characteristics. Though the Massachusetts Bay theocrats were ardently committed to reforming Christian practice in the English world (they were not Separatists like their neighbors in Plymouth), it is impossible to pin down what we might call Puritan theological orthodoxy. Instead, retrospective interpretations of conflicts and dissension worked to approximate a center of Puritan thought by excluding and rejecting ideas that the powerful determined were outside the sphere of acceptable Christianity.

The Salem Witch Trials Memorial fails to openly acknowledge its fictive as well as its historical components, rendering largely unintelligible the lessons that Tituba's conspicuous absence from the site could teach us. Linda Hutcheon shows how fiction works as a necessary correlate to history: we recognize one term as such in opposition to the other (not unlike how Fenton analyzes Catholicism with respect to Protestantism). Hutcheon demonstrates powerfully how contemporary Euro-American ways of knowing the past need history's other, the fictional, to understand the difference between the what-was and the what-might-have-been of historical fiction (105–23). When Salem conflates these categories, the historical slides into a too easy relationship with the speculative, and the ideological elements of its racialized aesthetics go unexamined. Thus Salem warps the productively underdetermined facts of the past into processed and packaged "knowns"; it withholds the best lessons of Salem's witch history—that America was always a global, multiethnic space and that whiteness-as-Americanness is a contingent, not necessary outcome of that history—to pawn off on its visitors a simpler sense of the unknowable as unquestioned essence.

We might find cause to celebrate the historicity of Salem: in appropriating

explanation under the true banner of commercialism, Salem's witch tourism demonstrates how other narratives of American exceptionalism rely on Puritan origin narratives. The attentive viewer can acknowledge that simplified claims about New England as homogeneously "Puritan" offer stripped-down interpretations of a more complex past; Salem's insubstantial kitsch could expose the monolithic Puritans as an equally flimsy construct, a "spiritualized" remnant of a complicated but not magical past.

Fessenden traces the beginning of the double nature of a spiritualized material world back to New English reading practices. As she shows, the region's predominant theology made little effort to distinguish the medium from the message in reading God's secret will in the stuff of the world. In the novels I consider throughout *The Story upon a Hill*, contemporary literary techniques disrupt the process whereby the "American" identifies with its spiritualized origin, the settled Puritan; they denaturalize the sense that the Puritanism handed to readers today existed as a unified and describable entity. Contesting the narrative that Puritanism organically morphed into an inclusive, secular America, these novelists provide alternative identities of colonial New England. Many of these works go straight to the DNA of America's generic innovations, using the forms of colonial expression against their own ideological purposes.

The representations of America's Puritan origins explored in the following chapters reassess the process whereby the term "Puritan" is retroactively applied not as a pejorative, but instead as a benign description or even a celebratory mantle. They push back against the many popularly held myths wherein bickering enthusiasts get recast as sober progenitors, in which repression and oppression are refigured as the generation of consensus, where the dream of a monistic theocracy is turned into a quest for religious freedom. Most important, these novels expose how an un(re)marked sense of ethnic Christian whiteness both arises and disappears in the production of a normative Americanness.

Many notable American novels since the late 1950s share the tendency to rewrite uncertainty into a posited core of Americanness. By tracing the creative representations of early New England in key late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century historical fictions, I highlight the contingent (rather than historically inevitable) interpretations of the past's possible meaning, and suggest how receptions of this history might be altered in the present. I begin, in chapter 1, by tracing the construction within popular historical discourse of a singular "Puritanism" out of the diverse Protestant movements that predominated in colonial New England. Chapter 2 focuses on two novels that attempt

to cast the Puritan-as-model-American myth into doubt; laudable though they may be, I argue, Hawthorne and Gaddis fail to substantively shift the United States' self-image-making process. Chapter 3 reads Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a neocaptivity narrative, underscoring how efforts to purge the United States of Puritan origin myths—by identifying hypocrisies inherent to them—may not necessarily fail but have failed heretofore. His is the first in a series of efforts to make so-called Puritan forms of American writing invoke alternative visions of American history. In chapters 4 and 5, I look at two other distinct attempts to reinscribe the forms of the Puritan myth with more inclusive visions of Americanness: both Thomas Pynchon and Marilynne Robinson offer more liberal roots of the Calvinist tradition by reworking the conversion narrative and spiritual autobiography. These two authors also mark a turn away from generalizing about a Puritan past in favor of highlighting New England's manifold approaches to Calvinism. In chapter 6, I discuss how a half century of literary attacks on the Puritan myth give rise to a cogent rebuttal of typological historiography and therefore American exceptionalism. Paul Auster and Colson Whitehead both underscore the simulacral nature of John Winthrop's legacy: *City of Glass*'s Henry Dark is a twentieth-century fabrication written into an idea of the colonial period; *Apex Hides the Hurt* likewise traces, in hilarious fashion, how an idealized Winthrop issues backward in time to influence our understanding of that history. I then conclude by evaluating Toni Morrison's effort to highlight the arbitrary manner in which Puritans—and the concomitant sense of a racial a priori—are established as central to the idea of America itself, anticipating what I expect will be an expanded effort to better understand colonial America as a borderlands space wherein plurality supersedes polarity in defining America's origins.

My long answer to the question of why postmodern-era writers vie for the soul of the Puritan myth follows in the subsequent chapters of this book. By the end, I hope to make the ostensibly remote New English colonists accessible to readers of contemporary American fiction. I also hope to show that this closeness helps postmodern critique (and whatever comes after it) identify potentials suppressed within popularized generalizations about the New English colonists. And finally, I hope to help reorganize some of the ways we group American writers from the postwar era, to begin again a conversation about how literature has engaged with history, not to free us from the past as much as to replace a privileged narrative's priority in determining the future with a more responsive—because more inclusive—story upon a hill.

1

THE WHAT THAT'S IN A NAME

SETTLING ON AN AMERICAN PURITANISM

When I reflect upon the consequences of this primary circumstance, methinks I see the destiny of America embodied in the first Puritan who landed on these shores, just as the human race was represented by the first man.

— Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

William Bradford, governor of the Plymouth colony and leader of the *Mayflower* voyage, indelibly branded his cohort of religious rebels with the name "pilgrims." In so doing, Bradford wrote conscientiously and at great pains to maintain a specific image. By referring to his followers' physical movement, rather than labeling their precise beliefs, he insisted his group drew its motivation from biblical prescriptions regarding Christian practice. Bradford's care regarding signifiers stems from an understandable reaction to an arguably childish feature of England's changing religious and political discourse beginning in the late fifteenth century: normative Anglicans sardonically hurled the epithet "Puritan" at sundry extreme-minded foes. Doing so imputed an unendurable sanctimony to radical English reformers' efforts: their causes ranged from disputing the minutiae of how priests dressed to advocating broad-based restructuring of how the Church of England was governed. Meanwhile, for Christians who generally shared the Calvinist belief that all humans are born totally depraved, and that no person is inherently pure, the name "Puritan" frankly stung.

Attempting to deflect such insults, the Congregationalists who colonized present-day New England referred to themselves in various ways: my own favorite is "hot Protestant," though more commonly they called themselves "godly" or "elect," "saint" or "saved," "dissenter" or "nonconformist," "regenerate," or simply "Christian." One underlying belief shared by the Plymouth and

Massachusetts Bay Colonies' leaders was their conviction that they were reforming ecclesiastical polity in accordance with the Bible. They aimed to purge the accreted ritual and so-called superstition that the Catholic Church developed from its early Roman period through European expansion. To call their project anything other than "Christianity" would only dilute the scope of their aims.

One might consider Bradford quite lucky. Despite his wife's possible suicide, which bookended the beginning of his time in the New World, and the dour silence with which *Of Plymouth Plantation*'s narrative of a failed communalist theocracy concludes, the Pilgrim brand still enjoys popular cachet, especially come the Thanksgiving holiday. On the other hand, the region's more successful reformers—such as those who established enduring colonies, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island—wound up saddled with the name they most loathed. The name "Puritan" surely evokes something in the minds of most even modestly educated Americans; "hot Protestant" simply lost whatever currency it may have once had. The story of the Puritan brand contains more than an easily inferred object lesson, though, about choosing names wisely.

UNORTHODOX CONSENSUS; OR, NON-CONSENSUAL ORTHODOXY

At the heart of the so-called Puritans' successes remains one oft-begged question: if their leaders shared so much in common, why do the aforementioned three colonies emerge from the first one within a decade? Another question also haunts conversations about the group; namely, if the word "Puritan" describes something, what is it? To date, scholars have offered any number of fine definitions. Michael P. Winship explains, "given [puritanism's] amorphous and polemical roots, 'puritanism' resists being pinned down into a fixed scholarly label, despite a wide variety of attempts to do so." It refers to a variety of different people, with some shared goals and "shared overlapping groups of negative reference points—the ungodly, church ceremonies and hierarchy, and Rome, among others." Nevertheless, "neither the goal nor the negative reference points necessarily added up to a harmonious whole, and puritanism points to unstable and dynamic coalitions not only between individuals and between groups, but even within individuals themselves" (*Making Heretics* 3). While one cannot simply dismiss the reality of New England's Christian communities, or even some purpose shared among a critical mass of influential believers, identifying that mission as "Puritan" creates problems rarely addressed.

"To whom," Winship wonders of seventeenth-century Anglicans, "should

they affix the stinging and fiercely resented tag of 'puritan'? John Cotton, on the receiving end, claimed 'that the righteous hand of the Lord struck him with madnesse who invented the term" ("Were There Any Puritans" 122–23). Winship defines English puritanism as a "relationship," and offers that New England's Congregationalists, in the absence of immediate antagonists in the New World, enjoyed advantages that would-be reformers in England did not. When early controversies spurred on by Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams plagued the infant Massachusetts Bay Colony, "New England authorities took firm measures to lower the chafing heat of puritanism" (126). Unprecedented political autonomy combined with a new mobility, permitting our modern illusion of coherence. "For almost a century," Winship explains, "the orthodox colonies preserved among their ministers a doctrinal unity, first through coercion and later through tacit understanding, that permitted them to sit out the crippling debates that shook English puritanism and nonconformity. . . . In New England, unlike in Old, hot Protestants did not have to endure each other's company; if their principles could not brook compromise, one element moved, or was cast away" (127). Owing to these qualities, Winship describes New England's varied Christian beliefs as always a "post-puritanism" (123): that is, a number of congregations and colonies informed by England's intertwined theological and political struggles but not wholly defined by them.

Historical memory has defined New England by its most prominent leaders; very often the leaders who endure in public memory are those whose words endure. The story of John Winthrop's "city upon a hill" and his fellow churchmen has thus fulfilled its own prophecy, at least discursively, for their story has been set upon a venerated hill within narratives of America's past; their story now forms a core whose secularized values appear to shape those shared by many contemporary Americans.[1]

Whence that core? Recent scholarship suggests it emerged slowly through the eighteenth century, but more durably in the literature of the early nineteenth century. Today the words "Puritan" and "Puritanism" have a wide range of meanings. "Puritanism" as a religious movement has no recorded theological orthodoxy, though agreement on ecclesiastical polity did bring some groups into alignment. "Puritan New England" does not have a discernible beginning: is it at Plymouth in 1620, or Salem (and then Boston) between 1628 and 1630? Nor does Puritan New England have a clear boundary, either geographically or temporally speaking.[2] The semantic expansiveness of the word perhaps accounts for the preponderance of books about Puritans, which often locate the Puritans

as the origins of one or another facet of American character; so, too, does historiography reveal that Puritanism is no longer commonly regarded as singular or uniform, though popular usage of the term and discussion of its referents rarely indicate an awareness of this.

In its first common usage, the term "Puritan" served to brand a number of groups and individuals that advocated more robust reform of Anglican Church polity and theology than was being pursued by English political and ecclesiastical leaders at the time. Not only were Congregationalists burdened by the term in sixteenth and seventeenth century England; so, too, were Presbyterians, Quakers, Anabaptists, and many others saddled with the derisive appellation. Somehow between then and the early nineteenth century, the term evolved beyond mere invective into a benign descriptor, and eventually into a name that conveys veneration.

The primary challenge confronting someone who would explain what New England's colonial leaders believed stems from their unwillingness or inability to commit a consensus idea of theological orthodoxy to print (despite their tendency to write down just about everything else). New England's Congregationalists initially agreed that Church authority should rest at the congregational level, which obviated global pronouncements on what constituted proper Christianity.[3] As a consequence, "Puritans may seem pretty definitive characters in their writings," Stephen Foster indicates, but "they were never good at spelling out what they were in toto. When they were foolish enough to try, they either botched the job and split their ranks or they made a great show out of solemnly dodging the decisive issues" (4). Despite the superb quality of his scholarship—without which writing this book would have been impossible—note the characteristic paradox: Foster makes claims about Puritans, even while acknowledging the absence of an identifiable bond uniting the Puritans to which he refers. Again, the descriptor precedes the description even though the people Foster describes identified themselves with other, equally available and legible terms.

Underlying many New English Christians' belief was a question of conscience to be answered through each believer's own careful study of the Bible. John Calvin was possibly the strongest influence on their theology; thus Calvinism offers perhaps the most accessible shorthand for explaining much of New English Reformed Christianity. Yet as David Steinmetz points out, "While the Puritan party in England was particularly susceptible to influences from Geneva [Calvin] and Zurich [Zwingli], it would be a serious error of historical judgment to equate Puritanism with Calvinism . . . though Puritanism can be regarded

as a special kind of Calvinism" (4–5). Nevertheless, he insists, "although Calvinism is not the only ingredient in American intellectual and religious history, it is such an important ingredient that no one can claim to understand American history and culture without some appreciation of its Calvinist heritage. Because Calvinism is deeply woven into the fabric of American cultural history . . . the study of Calvinism [is], to some extent at least, an exercise in [American] self-understanding" (5). Although a necessary element in New England's predominant theological belief, Calvinism alone does not sufficiently explain the varieties of Congregationalism populating the region. This problem raises a series of intriguing, if vexing questions. To what kind of Calvinism did a given congregation subscribe? And how much are these "Puritans" shaped by Calvin in comparison with other thinkers? Perry Miller finds Augustine's Neoplatonic theology to be a more powerful influence on his "New England Mind" is than Calvin, and perhaps most significant in understanding Massachusetts's predominant Christian denomination. Alternatively, Sacvan Bercovitch argues that Calvinism was more central to "Puritan" belief than Miller allowes. While the principal tenets of Calvinism cannot fully explain early New English Christianity, they are a very useful starting point to understanding today's regnant sense of American Puritanism.

According to Diarmaid MacCulloch's massive and widely respected history of the Reformation, the 1619 Synod of Dort formulated the reference points for developed Calvinism: first, the total corruption of humankind; second, the unconditional decree by God of election (otherwise known as salvation by grace, not works); third, the limiting of Christ's atoning death for humanity to those elect for salvation; fourth, the irresistibility of God's grace; and fifth, the unchallengeable perseverance in saving grace of God's elect (378). These tenets are sometimes rendered through the mnemonic device of the TULIP acronym: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance (or preservation) of the saints.[4] While these doctrines defined many Reformed Christians' beliefs, New Englanders also preached the belief in "mutual covenanting and confederation of the Saints according to the order of the Gospel" (Hooker, qtd. in Miller, *Orthodoxy* 170). New England's Calvinism took on a decidedly communal bent—covenant theology gave New England's political elites a license, indeed a responsibility, to the participatory government of ecclesiastical matters not afforded to Anglicanism or Presbyterianism (Miller, *Orthodoxy* 170).

Contemporary Americans have generally inherited an understanding that

American Puritanism centered on group-oriented Calvinism. In this model, God's election was not extended solely to solitary saints, but to their entire congregations. Predominant New English approaches to history writing exhibit the influence of such presumption, wherein biblical typology and hagiography extend into the New World's present and recent past.[5] The "errand into the wilderness" consisted of establishing the New Jerusalem: in short, they held that God had covenanted with the Israelites (twice), but with the crucifixion of Christ, Jewish people violated their bond and God bestowed his blessing on the Romans.[6] Owing to what they saw as the Holy Roman Empire's straying from the Bible's prescriptions regarding ceremony and its leaders' abuses of power, however, hot Protestants felt God transferred Christians' responsibilities to the English. Anglicanism, many dissenters maintained, failed to properly reform Christian administration. Thus a large group of nonconformists claimed they inherited God's sanction, which they carried with them to New England. It was there, the colonial theocrats sincerely hoped, that the final battles with Satan would be played out, and God's kingdom would become manifest on Earth in anticipation of true Christianity's worldwide triumph. From these beliefs—goes the story from at least the era of the American Revolution forward—a protonationalist project was born.[7]

In order to be accepted as a full member of God's true church (and thus have voting rights, if one was a land-holding man), New England's Congregationalists had to profess their conversion by God through his saving grace. A sense of certainty regarding election remained discouraged, though, or else the so-called saint was considered guilty of "presumption." While this grace could be neither earned nor resisted, the devil was a wily adversary who might fool the unregenerate soul into a false experience of salvation. The convert had to therefore continually express his devotion through consistent labor to God's ends: work was the expression of faith, no matter what a given person's calling; labor served the community spiritually as much as it improved its material conditions. This spiritualizing of things owned and done also led to an indistinct relationship between the sacred and the secular, resulting in the "ethic" of Protestantism that Max Weber identified.

Journals, poems, and other forms of meditative life-writing—in combination with an impulse to record histories of their respective colonial projects—served as records of good works justified by sanctified hearts, allowing believers to inspect their lives for continuing evidence of salvation. Hence, despite the aforementioned aversion to delimiting an orthodoxy, New England's hot

Protestants produced many more pages of text than did their largely Anglican countrymen in southern colonies, which accounts in no small part for their continuing influence in literary studies. Moreover, since election was corporate, and not singular, each of New England's predominant Christian congregations aspired to be a unified body rather than a group of distinct individuals. To be discrete was to be among the reprobate; mere self-interest was sinful.

New England's attempt at theocracy was an ambitious project—one which finally sputtered out, though we cannot say with certainty when. Some see the "half-way covenant" of 1662 as a severe blow to the New English vision. Others consider the First Great Awakening to be Puritanism in its death throes. Marilynne Robinson insists Puritanism died just before the 1950s. While this thing called American Puritanism most definitely did not emerge out of a desire for freedom of religion in a manner the New England colonial project is frequently credited with, the unusual blend of belief and action can be (and was, most especially in the early nineteenth century) refigured into a protodemocratic, even preliberal vision of society.[8]

REFORMING THE REFORMERS

Perhaps the first obviously celebratory usage of the "Puritan" brand occurs in Cotton Mather's 1702 *Magnalia Christi Americana*. Mather had previously used the term in *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), his defense of the Salem Witch Trials. Interestingly, Mather there describes "a great company of English *Protestants* and *Puritans*" (*Wonders* 31), indicating perhaps a distinction between the two groups, without defining which of his contemporaries might constitute the inheritors of those traditions. Mather's marking of a distinct "Puritanism" may reveal a deep anxiety about the new 1693 charter, which would permit for the open practice of Anglicanism in Massachusetts and which undermined the colonial theocrats' original aims.

The term's appearance in *Wonders* and in the *Magnalia* might indicate a zeitgeist shift, so I do not mean to credit Mather with an inaugural intervention in the history of American English. Nevertheless, Mather's appropriation of the former insult seems to mirror similar cultural appropriations of harmful labels to signify a kind of empowerment (Quakers offer a parallel example). Massive as it is, the *Magnalia* pursued a number of ends, but its most salient goal was to situate early American Congregationalist leaders in a typological narrative. Mather wanted to show that figures like William Bradford and John Winthrop were essentially predicted by "Old Testament" figures, including Nehemiah and

Moses. Such was to serve as evidence of America's fulfillment of biblical prophecy and demonstrate New England's status as "The New Jerusalem." Mather selects "Puritan" and its variant "Puritanism" (frequently paired with "Protestant") for figures he admires; most often he places the term nearby disdainful remarks about Anglican persecution of nonconformists, which he naturally finds reprehensible.

In context, the *Magnalia* evinces Mather's awareness that "Puritan" registered to many as overwhelmingly negative. Nevertheless, it is credited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for first using the phrase "our Puritan Fathers" in print. The context in which the phrase appears speaks to the term's predominantly negative connotations: "Upon the whole then, if any be displeased at my report of the unjust impositions and persecutions, which drove into America, as good Christians, and Protestants, as any that were left behind them, it will not be the True Church of England; for why should that be called, The Church of England, which has caused thousands of as real and thorough Christians, as any upon earth, to say, 'It is no better to dwell in the wilderness, than with such an contentious and angry one!' That Church of England, which alone is worthy to be called so, will bewail, as I know divers excellent persons now in the Episcopal Sees have done, the injuries offered unto our Puritan Fathers" (*Magnalia* III.13). Again, the usage here places "Puritan" in a narrative of persecution, yet Mather's tone of defiance is plain. Given that his early history of America exerted such influence on its time and on the subsequent two generations of Americans (see Baker's noteworthy *America's Gothic Fiction*), Mather surely contributed to rehabilitating the Puritan label.

That shift, when it did occur, was not sudden. The 1702 publication of the *Magnalia* not only failed to effect a broad sea change in the usage of "Puritanism" as a self-descriptor, it hardly seemed to impact Mather's own attitude toward it. In his later writings, the term shows up infrequently, and throughout the eighteenth century it makes only sporadic appearances in American periodicals as an honorific. Notwithstanding John Adams's respectful attitude in *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765), the boom time for "Puritans" seemed to coincide with the Plymouth bicentennial, though even then the term remained vexed.[9] For some, it retained its dismissive tone, portraying contemporaries or the "Puritans themselves" as intolerant, zealous killjoys. In an admirably thorough historical investigation into the term "Pilgrim Fathers," Albert Matthews relies heavily on, but fails to account for the emergence of, the respectful connotation of "Puritan." In tracing the distinction in meaning

between "Pilgrim" and "Puritan," he ultimately demonstrates that the debate as to whether or not the Plymouth founders were themselves "Puritan" seems to coincide with the popular transfiguration of the Puritan moniker. He locates the first salvo in the nomenclature contest in 1821, two years after the inaugural celebrations of Forefathers' Day by the Pilgrim Society. Indeed, I wonder whether or not the debate about the "Puritanness" of the Pilgrims is tied to the rise of the popular notion of Puritanism as a recognizable entity—as opposed to, say, "Congregationalism" or any of the other terms identifying the Massachusetts Bay colonial churches.

It would seem, then, that American popular understandings of what "Puritan" signifies shifted in a meaningful way at some point between 1810 and 1860. The growing nationalism of the nineteenth century needed a literature and a history, which coalesced in Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* and *The Scarlet Letter*, as well as in the poetry of Whittier, Longfellow, and any number of other New English writers. Like Hawthorne's stories, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* deliberately locates the roots of American democracy in New England. Tocqueville reaffirms Mather's historical narrative, claiming that America's national identity emerges in Plymouth and Boston, rather than in Virginia or in later periods of colonial history (see this chapter's epigraph). This is not to say that New English town governance had no bearing on the formation of Revolution-era or even modern America; I am simply asserting that Tocqueville's originary claim was primarily shaped by his need to distance American democracy from the injustice of slavery. Virginians, he avers, despite arriving earlier in the New World, failed to embody America's ethos of hard work by lazily relying on other men's forced labor: Tocqueville argues as much while ignoring the fact that Massachusetts was the first colony to formally legalize slavery (though not along overtly racial lines) in 1641. Those "Puritans" cited the Bible as precedent for justifying ownership of others; later "Puritans" did precisely the opposite.[10]

In large measure, Gordon S. Wood contends, the filiopietism evidenced toward "the Puritans" in early nineteenth-century histories stems from a desire to ground the Revolution in a righteous, conservative cause. As the first generation of Americans began to make sense of their parents' and grandparents' contributions to world affairs, a number of significant historians attempted to locate their motives in efforts to preserve extant liberties rather than forge unprecedented rights and freedoms (Wood 6). Hence, in the nineteenth century, a nationalist impulse to situate the increasingly settled Puritans in a continuum with the present takes its most concrete shape.

Daniel Webster's 1820 Plymouth address exemplifies the New English typological tradition by contending that his contemporaries continue to conflate the literal and the spiritual.[11] "Human and mortal although we are," he exclaimed, "we are nevertheless not mere insulated beings, without relation to the past or future" (Webster 35). He continues, "we live in the past by knowledge of its history; and in the future by hope and anticipation" (36). By keeping the spirit of the Reformed colonists alive, he contends, Americans "mingle our existence with theirs" (36). In that way, "we become their contemporaries" (36). As "links in the great chain of being . . . binding together the past, the present, and the future," Webster's contemporaries belong on the literal-historical continuum begun by the men and women of the Bible (37). Thus, his claims about what America was also read as claims about what America is, or at least what he wants it to be: that is, God-blessed Christians sharing in the only true God's special favor.

In an overt attempt to defend the "American Puritans" from their detractors, an early issue of the *New Englander and Yale Review* furthers Tocqueville's position on the originary status of the increasingly settled Puritans, asserting that "it would seem to be admitted as an established axiom in the philosophy of history, that the character of a people in its early life, involves the condition of its ultimate destiny" (352). The character of that people, the magazine contends, "embodied the genuine ideas of Saxon liberty, and the exalted patriotism of the British race" (354). The triumphs of these pioneers "now stand revealed to our eyes, by the light of two centuries" (355): in the essay's telling, the truth of New English history was always in its origins, but requires hindsight to extract it fully, since "such a work needed centuries to unfold and perfect the great design" (356). In working to defuse the incendiary quality hitherto evoked by the name "Puritan," the apologetic asserts that "our ancestors require no apotheosis to commemorate their virtues, other than the eternal remembrance of them. They need as little the aids of romance to set them in their proper light. Let only a perfect record of what they did, and what they designed, be made by the historian who would honor them most. The truth will be stranger than fiction. They will need no higher deification" (356). The article's author might consider his wishes for "eternal remembrance" fulfilled, for almost 175 years later, many historians as well as popular thinkers continue to honor the ancestors under discussion. By the turn of the twentieth century, perhaps owing simply to the preponderance of histories featuring "Puritan" in their titles, the stain of the primarily negative connotation had diminished—its invective sense does

not disappear, but is surely displaced from the term's primary connotation.

If this Puritanism is configured primarily in the nineteenth century as an origin of American virtues (including representative democracy; hard work; standing up for deep-seated beliefs in the face of unresponsive power; devout Christian faith; and belief in the necessity of education), the early twentieth century evidenced a significant return to skepticism about the unquestioned good of these roots. After William Carlos Williams vilified the early New Englishmen in *In the American Grain*, Arthur Miller questioned their inherent Americanness—or at least the value of their example. The playwright's allegorized version of the Salem Witch Panic of 1692 portrays the period as a time marked by paranoia and a desire to see the worst in people (not unlike Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"), and deliberately invokes this sense of the past to draw parallels to the McCarthy hearings. Arthur Miller arguably established the phrase "witch hunt" as a metonym for mass hysteria and persecution; his play erodes the foundation of Puritan rectitude in the popular imaginary. The ambivalence toward Puritan origin claims, especially in the late twentieth century and into the present, stems from a contest for the soul of New English history that seems to be growing in intensity.

Tellingly, it can be difficult to determine to whom the Puritan label would refer. Take, for an example, the group we commonly refer to as "antinomians" today. Though fellow travelers like Henry Vane and John Wheelwright held more prominent political positions within the Boston community, Anne Hutchinson is rightly their most memorable figure. Due to particular facets of disagreement, normative Congregationalists branded the movement "familism" and quickly worked to excise its presence from the Boston Christian community.

I raise the example of the familists to underscore how the filiopietistic narratives work. Anne Hutchinson was one of John Cotton's most ardent acolytes. While in England, she traveled a great distance to attend his services. When Cotton moved from England to Boston, Hutchinson followed. When others could not attend Cotton's sermons, or did not understand them, Hutchinson held popular discussions in her home, rehearsing and explicating Cotton's ideas. Thus Hutchinson should be seen as the same order of "Puritan" as Cotton—who happened to be viewed by many as the intellectual leader of the Boston Congregationalists. Yet she was expelled; formally, the government justified its exile on the grounds that she espoused nonnormative Congregationalist positions. Hindsight reveals, however, that Hutchinson's expulsion featured in a proxy battle between Winthrop's theocrats and Hutchinson's husband, as well

as then-Governor Henry Vane and a merchant class whose vision for Massachusetts veered in a more financially interested direction.

Hutchinson is only one figure who appears to be both Puritan and not: others would include Roger Williams, William Pynchon, and (to a certain extent) John Cotton himself, whose teachings fostered the beliefs that threw Hutchinson into suspicion. Not only does this problem of "belonging" to the community of Puritans confuse understandings of the past with the motivations of a present; it potentially infects the future as well. Albert Matthews highlights the nationalist connotation of Puritanism in a 1907 address delivered by President Theodore Roosevelt to the Cape Cod Pilgrim Memorial Association. In it, we can hear echoes of Tocqueville and see the seeds of later presidential addresses delivered by Kennedy and Reagan (discussed in chapter 6): "The coming hither of the Puritan three centuries ago shaped the destinies of this continent, and therefore profoundly affected the destiny of the whole world. . . . We cannot as a nation be too profoundly grateful for the fact that the Puritan has stamped his influence so deeply on our national life. . . . The splendid qualities which he left to his children, we other Americans who are not of Puritan blood also claim as our heritage. You, sons of the Puritans, and we, who are descended from races the Puritans would have deemed alien—we are all Americans to-day. We all feel the same pride in our genesis, in the history of our people; and therefore this shrine of Puritanism is one at which we all gather to pay homage, no matter from what country our ancestors sprang" (Roosevelt, qtd. in Matthews 293–94). According to Roosevelt, mythologizing the New English settler-colonists' actions is fundamental to establishing America's identity. Cotton Mather's *Magnalia* posited that Bradford and Winthrop were destined to create the New English colonies: for him, history was the inevitable living-out of the Gospels' divine script. Roosevelt, and later Kennedy and Reagan, nationalized and attempted to secularize this narrative.

Roosevelt's claim inadvertently unsettles as much as it reveals. While asserting that American identity is voluntary—which would be consistent with the Horatio Alger ideal of the time—it also seems to indicate that the self, claimed by the voluntary "American," must at least nominally identify with a Puritan lineage. This feels disturbingly like an ethnic Christianity, an Americanness defined by whiteness, the English language, and a radical reformed Christian belief. Enough ink has been deployed in service of defining an American "civil religion," which demonstrates a widespread belief that Americanness ought to be defined by the traits exhibited not by the founders of the Republic,

but instead by the early northern colonists. Indeed, Roosevelt literally advocates embracing mythical "Puritan" traditions rather than one's ethnic or national background in self-identifying as an American.

Thus Perry Miller's seminal *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* harbors a notable cognitive disunity, one that the title itself suggests. He cautions his reader about the slippery nature of the Puritan signifier, claiming that it "means all things to all men" (22). Despite this acknowledged ambiguity, the rest of the book endeavors to establish what precisely is a Puritan, rather than selecting another term for the New English settler-colonists who wished to reform English church polity. Miller's investment in the Puritan label likely stems from widespread fin de siècle misgivings about colonial New English thought. In attempting to effect his desired correction, the first book of his generation-defining *The New England Mind* acknowledges its methodological limitations, choosing 1660 as the ground on which to arrest the flux of New English logical and theological currents. The object (a "New England Mind") that book produced made a remarkable impact on American historical, literary, and cultural studies: the venerable Bercovitch refines his analyses in the 1970s against a Miller "whose corpus remains pretty much intact" (*American Jeremiad* xv); even into the 1990s it seems to inform Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, who, when generalizing about New English Congregationalists' reading habits, contend "if a home in the American colonies possessed any books besides the Bible, they were likely to be *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Paradise Lost*" (11). From publication records, we can surmise Armstrong's and Tennenhouse's Puritans date from no earlier than the 1670s. The fact that New England's predominant colonizers rejected the term so frequently central to twenty-first-century descriptions of them raises serious questions. Bercovitch tests these questions when he describes a retrospective "vision" of Puritanism that "survived through a mode of ambiguity that denied the contradiction between history and rhetoric—or rather translated this into a discrepancy between appearance and promise that nourished the imagination, inspired ever-grander flights of self-justification, and so continued to provide a source of social cohesion and continuity" (*Jeremiad* 17). Bercovitch points out the enduring qualities of "the Puritan ideal," which manifested as a "myth that remained central to [American] culture" (17). Which persons' ideas and accents did not count among the society that cohered and continued was not a significant area of inquiry until later historians and cultural critics raised the concern, though Bercovitch does move us beyond Miller's monolithic mind by calling attention to the modern operations of the myth.

The stakes here could not be higher, for as historians from the nineteenth century and beyond crystallized both a vision of the past and a sense of that story's value, the reconsiderations and interpretations of that history come to stand in the place of the people and events those narratives purport to illuminate. As in scholarship on earlier periods of American writing (including Fenton, Franchot, Gura, Hickman, and Jaudon, among others), readers of contemporary novels should keep in mind the process by which Protestants seized the stamp of "Americanness," as well as the power to mint its rhetorical coinage. To get back to that time, however, we should embrace terms that more sensitively grapple with the dynamic, nonlinear ecology of belief that marked New English theological and ecclesiastical debates.

By the early 1980s, increasingly sophisticated dissent to Miller's systematic "Puritan Mind" began to emerge in American historiography. For example, Philip Gura suggests that Miller's method "reveals more about his own desire for order than it does the full complexity of the New England mind in the seventeenth century" (*Scion's Glory* 6). Rejecting Miller's reified Puritan, Gura argues "*heterogeneity*, not unanimity, actually characterized the colony's religious life" (7). The trend toward such factionalist reading persists in contemporary scholarship. Richard A. Bailey's *Race and Redemption in Puritan New England* names early on the various groups to which the term can refer. "Perhaps the most obvious indication of this dissonance involves the many Protestants we can describe as puritans," he writes, "including Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Baptists. Based on the statements of faith of these groups, labeling all of them as puritans is not really the stretch one might initially think" (20).[12] Despite his retaining the term "Puritan," Bernard Bailyn has recently described a mid-seventeenth century New English countryside notable for a "provincial society that was full of creative energies but contentious, dedicated to the high ideals of reformed Protestantism but riven by conflicting views of how those ideals should be interpreted and realized, and abrasive as it sought to impose on ordinary people the demanding discipline of the Puritans' worldly asceticism. The fractious history of Puritan New England in its early years—the animosities, the conflicts, the reprisals, the community schisms and forced expulsions: all of this was a product of many conditions and forces—the geopolitical and cultural diversity of the population's origins, the personalities of the religious and secular leaders, the trauma of displacement and resettlement—but above all it was the result of the basic instability and inner turbulence of Puritanism itself" (366). Outside the framing context of American exceptionalism, which

somehow makes this English parochialism into American democracy's crucible, Bailyn's description reads like a narrative of England itself during the seventeenth century. Consequently, the distinctively "American" character of these "Puritans" remains unclear.

Scholarship's unflagging commitment to the word Puritan—to redefining it, rather than abandoning it in the face of its lack of foundation in historical reality—not only baffles me, but leads to further complications as we examine how its imprecision can affect who we reference by that term, and under what circumstances. The challenge scholars face when discussing "Puritan" times, which vary in definition from thinker to thinker, arises because New English Christians eschewed sectarian titles. Their repudiation of labels stands to reason, given their suspicions regarding inventions. If new practices represent a falling away from divine instruction, new names (other than "Christian") also evidence movement away from the Bible's prescriptions.

In many American representations of history, "Puritanism" has become shorthand for a complex group of believers, whose theological, political, intellectual, and economic goals varied. Despite advances in our understanding, however, many writers risk inadvertently affirming the Puritans' originary presence by suggesting that a uniform Puritan identity existed in the seventeenth century, rather than recognizing how the homogenization of New England's Congregationalist (and Presbyterian) churches into a single nameable entity occurred almost exclusively in subsequent interpretations of those people and their actions. "There is still," Winship argues, "a kind of deeply settled, reflexive essentialism among New England scholars. It manifests most clearly in the not uncommon habit of using 'puritan' as an adjective before all and sundry legislation, persons, social customs, religious practices, what have you, in seventeenth-century New England and beyond" ("Were There Any Puritans" 131).[13] It is unlikely that any two of New England's Christians agreed exactly on points of doctrine; so, too, did the colonists' economic interests vary significantly. Public disagreements bubbled up quickly in Plymouth Plantation's first decade. And again, discordance within Massachusetts Bay led to the establishment of Connecticut and Rhode Island as separate colonies within ten years.

Yes, most ardent New English Protestants shared a belief in the doctrine of *sola scriptura*: the claim that the Bible is the inerrant word of God's truth, that it contains all the knowledge necessary for salvation, and that it should be read by each person to fully understand what of God's will humankind can understand. Many also advocated that individual congregations settle matters

of doctrine. But to state even this is to generalize about these communities, for within the northern English colonies of the New World there were unknowable numbers of Anglicans, Quakers, Presbyterians, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and so forth, not to mention nonbelievers.[14]

Nineteenth-century struggles for control over narratives about Puritanism in popular culture and literature largely shifted by the early twentieth century, as Modernist literary production rejected "Puritanism and its legacy [as representing] all that had been wrong with American culture" (Gura, "Jonathan Edwards" 154).[15] Despite any number of reasons why post-World War II writers might have wished to forget their own connections to the reified Puritan, debates about the meaning of that past nevertheless flowered again in the seemingly unlikely multicultural soil of late-twentieth-century and contemporary American fiction. In the details of how the people who hated to be called Puritans became America's most potent origin myth lies an oft-ignored counternarrative. Seen a certain way, their experiences could be summed up thusly: within a generation, a number of would-be theocrats stumbled out of lockstep and into squabbling. An alarming percentage of the Massachusetts Bay Colony's elites was expelled from or left Boston angrily (or both). And by the end of their century, the men who set out to establish a Congregationalist "city upon a hill" instead set the stage for an ongoing drama of incommensurable theologies, unsustainable expectations for widespread religious fervor, and an unclear relationship between political, liturgical, and economic values.

Rather than letting the Puritan origin myth lie undisturbed, contemporary American novelists detected its resurgence in literary-critical and popular discourse. Noting its rhetorical force, Gaddis and Vonnegut give us a fractious, fragmented past for an equally incoherent present. Pynchon and Robinson remind their readers that Congregationalism was and is not a political theology according to modern divisions—no one vision defines either its history or future. Finally, Auster, Whitehead, and Morrison all recognize the value of directing such conversations; each grants New England's originary power—and points out that more than one idea of America can issue therefrom.

The field of "Puritan studies" has moved forward by recognizing the originally globalized roots of American thought. These developments in history and literary studies are beginning to counterbalance demagogical practices that exert far greater force on the collective memory of colonial America than do specialists' recent gains. The public, politicians, and scholars alike should take

this next step of recognizing that the term "Puritan" itself describes a description, and is not particularly helpful in identifying the thoughts, actions, and writings of the figures that precede Cotton Mather's consolidation and projection of their meaning in history.

2

HAWTHORNE, GADDIS, AND MODELS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY

Hawthorne talked about horrified at success with the public taste, with the crowd meant you must have sold out, send the author of The Marble Faun out on a book tour? Out giving readings from the Blithedale Romance to entertain this gaping clutch of pleasure seeking chance persons, this enormous market of the non-literate and half-literate devouring the poets who compose to please the bad taste of their reviewers end up instructing one another, what this glorious democracy in the arts is all about isn't it?

—Gaddis, *Agapē Agape*

While traveling through Europe during the middle of his century, a writer accumulates material for his longest novel. Markedly different from the northeastern part of the United States (in which he spent some of his youth carousing at an elite private institution of higher learning), the Mediterranean landscape, with its baroque artwork, architecture, and expansive Catholicism, inspires him to reflect on the puritanical attributes of his homeland. The book he writes blends guidebook with conspiracy plot and, despite initially mixed reviews, now enjoys wide respect as a major novel in the American canon.

This story describes equally well both Nathaniel Hawthorne and William Gaddis; moreover, the correspondences between *The Marble Faun* and *The Recognitions* carry far beyond these biographical resonances. Hawthorne's final completed novel and Gaddis's first one feature uncommonly talented painters who, by and large, succeed only when painting in outmoded styles; their narratives follow worldly artists seeking to make sense of themselves in a changing (art) world; and they examine an America that, at once, is defined by and repudiates its global history. While one may fairly categorize the shared biographical coincidences as felicitous trivia, the novels' similar plots, characters, and thematic concerns are anything but inconsequential.

Read as a source text for *The Recognitions*, *The Marble Faun* highlights how

Hawthorne defines the concept of the Puritan as a kind of counterfeit category. He shows how a certain class of New Englanders produced their predecessors in their own ostensibly blameless self-image, on the eve of an internecine conflict centered largely on America's deplorable racial divisions. In reply, *The Recognitions*' main characters, Wyatt and Otto, act as doubled reincarnations of Hawthorne's Hilda. Gaddis's first novel recapitulates Hawthorne's final completed one; it reminds readers how Hawthorne's historiography remains relevant in a twentieth-century context, albeit transferring Hawthorne's anxiety about race and ethnicity to a critique of capitalist values.

Hawthorne and Gaddis both concern themselves with the manner in which models of Americanness are constructed, and how these models fail the test of historical and theological scrutiny. To serve as a "Puritan" model for American identity, Hilda must repudiate Christianity's Afro-Jewish roots; similarly, Gaddis's antiheroes, the Gwyons, go mad in their attempts to privilege anti-Augustinian origins and thereby escape Protestantism's influence on them as Americans in the twentieth century.[1] Both writers, moreover, evince some skepticism toward the idea of a coherent "Puritan" religion, exposing instead the illusory "originality" of America that sustains a pervasive xenophobia. The Puritans in these novels share more with the forged racial purity of New England than with colonial America's multinational reality. Gaddis revisits Hawthorne because *The Marble Faun*'s attempt to cry down the hypocrisy of New English exceptionalism, while laudable, fails to unsettle the centrality of Puritans in America's regnant origin myth. Gaddis registers frustration and disgust with an America that cannot distinguish artistic production from a secularized Calvinist capitalism that at once celebrates and denies artistic self-definition. For all his disdain, Gaddis nevertheless writes with beauty and humor and offers appreciation as its own end and as an antidote.

THE TALENTED "MR. DIFFICULT"

Gaddis announces his debt to *The Marble Faun* with what Jonathan Franzen identifies as a signature "difficulty," which may explain why scholars have largely missed the connections between Gaddis's greatest novel and Hawthorne's most perplexing one.[2] His playful method of appropriating Hawthorne involves the Gwyon family history: long-time New English folk, the novel's most important characters live in a parsonage borrowed from a congregation the narrator labels "Puritan." In using this anachronistic referent, Gaddis calls attention to New England's simultaneously distant and modern history. The clan's matriarch,

Reverend Gwyon's Aunt May, attends to the family's dissolving connection to her religious tradition ardently but with deep dismay, if you'll pardon a pun the novel surely invites. Similarly, in the form of a portrait that hangs on a wall in the parsonage's parlor, the first American Gwyon—the long-departed John H. Gwyon—maintains an unwavering gaze over his modern progeny. The painting's influence, incidentally, has a chilling effect similar to the one that haunts the Pyncheon residence in Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*.

While Gaddis's narrator forthrightly allies the Gwyon family's progenitor with John Huss by directly naming that "hero" of the Protestant Reformation (Gaddis, *TR* 28), the novel also evokes another prominent John H.: namely, New England's John Hathorne.[3] Both figures, the fictitious Gwyon and the historical Hathorne, agreed that "to suffer a witch to live was as offensive to the God of Calvin, Luther, and Wesley, as it was to That of the Pope of Rome," and that their hands "had done their work, passed on the heritage of guilt" through each family's lineage (*TR* 23). Partly due to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, John Hathorne remains perhaps the most notorious judge responsible for pressing one man to death, in addition to hanging fourteen women, five men, and two dogs during the Salem Witch Panic of 1692. Many subsequent Gwyons remain committed to the religion that justified such abhorrent acts. Ultimately, Reverend Gwyon goes mad trying to track that religion back to its origins, after which his son Wyatt undergoes a similar mental breakdown in pursuing devotional art back to its purest form. For America's most famous Hawthorne, the burden of this guilt emerges as an attempt to rewrite the past: first, in shame, by adding a "w" to Hathorne; and then by adding one of America's most significant bodies of literature to complicate the Puritan myth—culminating in *The Marble Faun*.[4]

Gaddis's ludic yet challenging style deploys a delightfully dense layer of blended citation and allusion. Allow me to offer just two more examples. In one, Hawthorne opens *Faun* by remarking on the "domes of Christian churches" that punctuate the Roman skyline, "built on the old pavements of heathen temples, and supported by the very pillars that upheld them" (6). In *The Recognitions*, Gaddis's Reverend Gwyon visits just such a church—the basilica of San Clement in Rome—under which lies a mithraeum, also from distant times (38). The "pagan" roots of Christianity comprise a major theme of both books. In another connection to *Faun*, Gaddis chooses the less common name "Hawthorn tree" for the plant more familiarly known as the May tree. Gaddis exploits this fact by making Aunt May's most beloved garden plant a

Hawthorn whose death seems to precipitate her own. Because *Faun* is so influential a source, Gaddis provides a bevy of clues indicating the bond between the Gwyon family's experiences and Hawthorne's fictions.

The two novels' overlapping interests extend to their central thematic concerns. At 956 pages in its first edition, the plot of Gaddis's novel is indeed difficult to gloss, but its most salient motifs include the problems of origins, originality, and artistic mastery. Its primary storyline centers on a scam carried out by a near-accidental forger named Wyatt Gwyon and the dealer/critic duo Basil Valentine and Recktall Brown, who work together to produce, "authenticate," and sell fake "originals" by long-dead artists. All manner of forgers, counterfeiters, and fakes populate the novel—not the least significant of whom is Otto Pivner, a would-be playwright whose abilities seem limited to appropriating the wisest and wittiest remarks made by his friends and acquaintances. Gaddis's book explores the idea of what makes one thing an original and another a copy (not unlike New England itself), but aptly concludes without clearly delineating the distinction between the two. If *The Recognitions* does imagine an "original" artist, the most likely candidate would be the ardently Catholic composer, Stanley, who, in the performance of his greatest organ piece, inadvertently collapses a cathedral onto himself at the book's end. The weight of the past, one could say, is too much for the artist's work to bear.

Much of history's pressure, for Wyatt, issues from an anachronistic New English Puritanism. That the Gwyons are labeled Puritans is, to my eye, one of the funnier gags in *The Recognitions*. Throughout this book, I drop perhaps appropriate scare-quotes from the word Puritan in large measure because Hawthorne consistently toyed with its ambivalent resonances. When Gaddis and Hawthorne in particular write about Puritanism, they do so in reference to the myth more than they do to the New English Congregationalists.

Adhering to exaggerated New English injunctions against visual representation, Aunt May continually scourges her young grandnephew Wyatt for his artistic impulses. She unwittingly drives him to practice drawing in secret because she believes that "to sin is to falsify something in the Divine Order, and that is what Lucifer did. [. . .] [Wyatt] tried to become original, she pronounced malignantly, shaping the word round the whole structure of damnation, repeating it, crumpling the drawing of the robin in her hand, —original, to steal Our Lord's authority, to command his own destiny, to bear his own light! That is why Satan is the Fallen Angel, for he rebelled when he tried to emulate Our Lord Jesus" (34).[5] Theologically along the same lines (though maybe a bit

further along the tracks, recalling Hawthorne's Hilda) of her Congregationalist ancestors, whose spare meeting houses and ascetic artistic tradition boasted the motto "God's altar needs not our polishings" (Cotton, qtd. in Daly, *God's Altar* 1), Aunt May sees all artistic representation as a breach of the commandment against graven images. Eventually, May permits Wyatt to copy paintings, which she does not equate with original creation. From this experience, Wyatt develops a deep appreciation for Flemish Primitives' painting and an uncommon ability to emulate their style.

Wyatt takes his Renaissance-era skills and aesthetics with him to Europe, where, freed from America's oppressive Protestant ethic and pragmatism's "cash value," he pursues the history of art to find his ideal.[6] In Munich, Herr Koppel, a different type of totalitarian figure from his aunt, also castigates attempts at "that romantic disease, originality" (*TR* 89) in trying to teach Wyatt to paint. Hence a conflict begins to brew within Wyatt. While he rejects Aunt May's self-styled Puritan legacy for its iconophobia, he accepts its suspicion of originality as the measure of genius. Wyatt sputters out his own art theory in an objection to the corrupt critic, Basil Valentine, who accuses Wyatt of refusing "any sort of criticism": "No I, it's just, criticism? It's the most important art now, it's the one we need most now. Criticism is the art we need most today. But not, don't you see? not the 'if I'd done it myself.' Yes, a disciplined nostalgia, disciplined recognitions" (335). A most puzzling claim, his statement has been interpreted variously, and to various ends, within Gaddis scholarship. Yet no one, to my knowledge, has noticed its resonance with Hawthorne's description of his painter-protagonist's masterful copying: "it strikes us that there is something far higher and nobler in all this—in her thus sacrificing herself to the devout *recognition* of the highest excellence in art—than there would have been in cultivating her not inconsiderable share of talent for the production of works from her own ideas" (*Faun* 60, emphasis added).[7] Gaddis thereby practices what Wyatt preaches; he writes *The Recognitions* as a critical response to the commentary implicit in *The Marble Faun*. His "disciplined nostalgia" extends Hawthorne's frustration with New England's absent religious self-awareness to a broader critique of America's Christianized capitalist reflexes.

A few scholars have traced *The Recognitions*' relationship to Hawthorne, but only in sketch form: Tony Tanner notes that "in looking back to Hawthorne while it looks ahead to Pynchon, [Gaddis's] novel reminds us of the continuities we might otherwise, perhaps, overlook" (qtd. in Koenig 71). Likewise, John Seelye comments that "there are several references, of course, direct and oblique

to Melville and Hawthorne in Gaddis's novel," and that Gaddis's work "holds so much in common with the later novels of . . . Hawthorne that there is a possibility that *The Recognitions* may be an attempt to extend the stylistic experiments of the American Renaissance" (71). Not only does Hawthorne's style echo throughout *The Recognitions*, Hawthorne's critique of America's anachronistic Puritan myth also aids in understanding the young Gaddis's commentary on his time. Like Wyatt, *The Marble Faun*'s greatest artist imagines herself belonging in the company of the old masters. Moreover, Hilda, an American who moves to Rome in pursuit of an artistic career, lacks the talent to compose original works of merit. She instead produces copies that exceed her source works' greatness; her skill is such that she can reproduce Guido Reni's notoriously irreproducible portrait of Beatrice Cenci from memory.[8] Another central artist character, Miriam, is a swarthy Englishwoman who hides her background from Rome's society, prompting speculation that a scandal stains her past. *Faun*'s narrative action centers on the murder of a man simply called "the Model": Donatello, a quaint and impish Italian nobleman, shoves this mysterious Model to his death for stalking Miriam. Hawthorne's narrative suggests that the Model could shine a damaging light on Miriam's dark past—either on something she'd done or, perhaps worse, something she was: descended from a Jewish or black Africanist lineage that would compromise her high social standing. Donatello's action, then, could issue from a perceived threat to Miriam's physical safety or, just as likely, a threat to her social status.

The fair-skinned Hilda also has no known ancestry; but by repeatedly calling her a "daughter of the Puritans," *Faun* indicates how the settled Puritan emphasizes some aspects of Congregationalism's history while suppressing other elements. I contend that part of the tension underpinning Hawthorne's novel comes when Hilda has to confront Catholicism, not simply in the present—as a practice of faith competing for her belief—but also as a reminder of her Protestant faith's history. In destroying the novel's literal Model, *Faun* connects Hilda's forswearing of her pagan and African/Jewish compatriots to a deliberate excising of Christianity's non-European sources. Setting a provincial "daughter of the Puritans" in Rome's deeply cosmopolitan context presses back against ahistorical renderings of New English identity.

HAWTHORNE'S PURITANISM AGAINST NEW ENGLISH CHRISTIANITY

Though it is well established that relatively few readers make their way through *The Recognitions*, most students of American fiction have read *The Scarlet Letter*,

Hawthorne's most highly regarded work of fiction. Set at an indistinct time in American colonial history, it recapitulates certain key aspects of those events we now call the "Antinomian Controversy" of 1635–1637 (Colacurcio, "Footsteps"), a moment of distinct tension between theocratic and mercantile visions of the English colonial enterprise in North America. In it, Hawthorne renders some of his most memorable characters: the frustratingly caring Dimmesdale, who cannot decide which members of the community he is most responsible to; the proud and powerful Hester Prynne; and the evil Chillingworth, whose (Sophoclean) Oedipal obsession with ferreting out the criminal in his midst implicates Chillingworth himself in the story's worst crimes. Striking, too, is the parallel between its introduction and its conclusion: "The Custom-House" section invokes the established convention of the found-manuscript-as-source, while its final line paraphrases Marvell's "The Unfortunate Lover" and cites Walter Scott in invoking the language of heraldry (Buell, "Problem" 75). *The Scarlet Letter* is, in this way, largely a book about reading. The residents of its fictionalized Salem attempt to inscribe Hester's identity in a single way—that is, as "adultress"—but her actions redefine the "A" as standing for "able." Hester wrests control of her narrative from the Puritanical ministers who would moralize her life for her; that Dimmesdale cannot or will not take the same command of his identity ultimately leads to his demise.

Hawthorne had also written extensively about colonial New England with great frequency in his short fiction prior to composing his most famous work. In "Endicott and the Red Cross," for instance, the characteristic irony Hawthorne typically deploys in his treatment of Puritans abounds. Keeping in mind how fraught the Puritan moniker remained in Hawthorne's time, the irony of his stories appears even more forthright. How much bravery should we read in Endicott's iconoclastic tearing of the red cross from inside the English flag, in defiance of a king and sympathetic countrymen, at a remove across the Atlantic? So, too, "The Grey Champion" complicates its own lesson. True, its mythical man of history does emerge from the crowd to stand on protorevolutionary principles against the King's assertion of authority over the Massachusetts colonists; his stand is "the *type* of New England's hereditary spirit" (243, emphasis added), recalling the typological tendency to conflate facts of history with historical interpretation.[9] Nevertheless, the seemingly mythical Champion's authority rests in "the scaffold" (242); that is, "his shadowy march," which "New England's sons will vindicate," indicates not simply his courage in the face of the King's army, but also the violent repression that made his society cohere.

In most of Hawthorne's historical fiction, the slippery nature of the past's possible meaning eclipses any single moral. Much of Hawthorne's writing about history displays an acute awareness that the manner of representation entwines inextricably with the matter at hand. His careful blending of firelight, moonlight, and mirror-imaging in "The Custom-House" evinces a keen sense that historical depth emerges as an effect of light and reflection; moreover, many of Hawthorne's most famous short stories emphasize the interpretive quality of the Puritan legacy by foregrounding the influence of his present in aligning the terms of the past into a coherent, purportedly teleological narrative. But, surprisingly, perhaps his most compellingly nuanced representation of New England appears in *Faun*, the deftness of which is evident in the irony of its preface. "Italy, as the site of [the author's] Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity" (4). To the reader of *The Scarlet Letter*, *House of the Seven Gables*, and his many short stories that involve America's colonial history, this brief preface to *The Marble Faun* could well read as inconsistent if not outright sarcastic. Written on the eve of the American Civil War, and treating, as it does, the problem of racial ancestry and the largely fictional assertion that America's origins are primarily English ones, "*The Marble Faun*," Blythe Ann Tellefsen convincingly argues, centrally engages the question of "whether or not African Americans and Catholic immigrants can become full-fledged Americans" (Tellefsen 459). In this respect, Donatello and Miriam command the greatest interest, but to understand why, one must recognize Hawthorne's skepticism toward the seemingly perfect Hilda.

To an extent, Hilda's skill aligns perfectly with the standards for meaningful artistic production as outlined in other Hawthorne stories involving art. Hawthorne's greatest artists are those whose works infuse matter with spirit.[10] Indeed, Hilda may well be endowed with the gift of going "straight to the central point in which a Master conceived his work," and thus "view[ing] it, as it were, with his own eyes," so that "her comprehension of any picture that interested her was perfect" (*Faun* 57). She may well effect a real and sincere aesthetic connection with artists of the past, but she is emotionally inaccessible to those immediately around her.

Moreover, while Hilda is better able than others to reproduce an image,

her interpretation somehow severs the representation from the model that inspired the image to begin with. As in her copy of Reni's *Beatrice*, Hilda's feelings toward an image and its painter lose their ties to the history that produced them. For all her sympathy with Reni's renowned image, so gracefully expressed in Hilda's "infinitely heart-breaking" knowledge of the "hopelessness of [Beatrice's] case"—Hilda being herself a "fallen angel, fallen and yet sinless"—Miriam reminds Hilda that she had "forgotten Beatrice's history," her "inexpiable crime" (66). Hilda's connection to the immortal aspects of art may be strong, we are informed, but her sense of history comes up far short of Miriam's. Hilda's sense of the past seems to be rendered anew in its immediate moment; the purity of Beatrice's image, in Hilda's vision, obscures her complicity in a crime that mirrors Donatello's. Whatever sympathy Hilda conjures, it is with an idealized image of the past, not with her peers or with the history that image commemorates.

Situated at the novel's outset within the highest recesses of a church's bell tower, "worthy to be Jacob's ladder, or, at all events, the tower of Babel," Hilda "dwell[s] above our vanities and passions, our moral dust and mud, with the doves and angels for [her] nearest neighbors": or so Miriam claims (53).[11] Hawthorne continually associates his copyist with Catholicism's Virgin Mary, who was exempted from original sin at the time of her birth, at least according to Catholics. Figured in this way, Hilda cannot be seen as genuinely Christian in the sense articulated by Calvin. Her upright bearing leaves her far apart from the community of those ethnically "other" from her and distorts, by ostensibly improving, the past; seeking the utmost in purity, she spurns her friends and disappears from the group when she is abducted.[12] Only after wrestling with Protestantism's Catholic roots, as she "confesses"—or, as Baym holds, "tattles" on—Miriam's and Donatello's sins (Baym 370), can Hilda marry Kenyon, presumably to ensure the preservation of her purely Puritan future. Kenyon and Hilda can then continue to insist on her ultimate innocence through her rejection of the *felix culpa* (*MF* 460), and she can be "worshipped as a household Saint, in the light of [Kenyon's] fireside" 461) at the novel's end.

Hilda thus may be, as Conrad Shumaker contends, "the apotheosis of the American girl as the nineteenth century envisioned her" (82), but that would be so if the nineteenth century is understood to be inhabited only by Protestant and white citizens. By contrast, John Michael shows that "*The Marble Faun* . . . undermines the simplistic epistemological and moral assumptions on which

the practice of nineteenth-century history depends" (150). Thus it is difficult to argue (as Shumaker does) that Hilda is a positive figure who "represents a final commentary on the course [Hawthorne] believes American history should take" (65). In order to be a "daughter of the Puritans" in the typological sense of being-as (rather than copy-of), then she "cannot change or grow" (Schiller 386). Should Hilda wish to see herself as tied to her originary purity, then stasis must rule; change would indicate difference, which would signify severance from the original. Concomitantly, Hilda's final judgment and rejection of Miriam and Donatello as sinners indicates a fundamental rejection of Italians/Catholics (Donatello) and Jews/black Africans (Miriam) in what might otherwise be stories about where and when the United States and its value systems originated—a point well established in works by Nancy Bentley and Blythe-Ann Tellefsen.[13]

The rejection of her non-English religious progenitors constitutes the fiction of Hilda's Puritanism. To call New England's predominant spiritual belief a "fundamentalism" would be something of an anachronism, but radical reformers did seek to strip away much of the ritual accumulated by Catholicism through the first half of the last millennium. The "purity" of practice reformers sought to achieve was grounded in a sense that orthodoxy—to the extent such a thing could exist in Congregationalist Christianity—was articulated in Leviticus and Paul's epistles; to greater and lesser degrees, New English divines relied on Augustine, Calvin, Petrus Ramus, and other thinkers to complement the biblical sources. As a "daughter of the Puritans," Hilda would identify as ethnically English, but *The Marble Faun* exposes how she has to excise the influence of Jews, Roman Catholics, and even—through her blameless self-image—the North African Augustine's possible blackness as genealogical components of her English and Protestant identity. Hilda needs a kind of "virgin birth" in order to see her white, English "Pilgrim Fathers" as in any way originary for her Christianity; it is from Augustine, after all, that Calvin drew his emphasis on the doctrine of total depravity. *The Marble Faun*, then, reveals how New English Protestantism inscribes whiteness at its center by denying its affinities with Catholics, Jews, and black Africans whose contributions make that Protestantism at all possible. More important, it serves as a reminder that Protestantism invents its origin in the present, deliberately forgetting its global and multicultural roots. Hence Hilda's Beatrice is hers alone: not Rome's, nor history's, merely Hilda's unblemished image of beauty, implicating no sinful past.

Gaddis's Puritans are every bit as anachronistic, and ahistorical, as Hilda. Reverend Gwyon descends from the aforementioned John H. Gwyon,[14] the first in a long, and mostly unbroken, line of ministerial Gwyon men who were seen as Puritan in both religion and character (13). His was a family that "had lived with rock-like negligence of time's passage." Traditionally, Gwyon men were "conceived in guilt and perpetuated in refusal. They had expected the same for him" (13), but Wyatt's father did not inherit precisely those traits. His youthful missionary work among American Indians in the West found him more sympathetic to their traditions than insistent upon his own, and his performance reflected that stance. Worse yet (to his detractors), he decided to embark upon a voyage to Catholic Spain, upsetting his Calvinist congregation. The reverend's wife dies en route because a forger named Frank Sinisterra attempted to steal passage by posing as a ship's surgeon, but was caught when he refused to perform an appendectomy on Camilla. After the ship's captain unsuccessfully attempted the procedure, her burial in foreign soil further incites his congregation's umbrage.[15] This trip takes him to Rome: there the Reverend sees firsthand the mithraeum beneath the Cathedral of San Clement, which apparently increases his interest in the pagan foundations of the Christian religion.

The narrative makes clear from the outset that the reverend was never so fully a devout Puritan as Aunt May would have liked, but his obvious turn away from Christianity of any kind occurs when both European religion and science fail his son. Suffering from a rare tropical illness, the young boy is sent home to die by doctors who congratulate themselves for merely diagnosing the malady.[16] Unsatisfied with the efforts of his peers and his God, Gwyon seeks, in a manner of speaking, more established traditions. "When modern devices fail," asserts the narrator, "it is our nature to reach back among the cures of our fathers. If those fail, there were fathers before them. We can reach back for centuries" (45). Gwyon does reach back for centuries, though it becomes uncertain whether he still believes that Christ died for his son's immortal soul. He appeals to an older, alternately traditional ritual of imputation (so to speak) practiced by the Garos of Assam for his son's more immediate, mortal needs.[17] In accordance with the Indian ritual, the reverend brought Heracles, the family's pet Barbary ape procured during Gwyon's travels abroad, into Wyatt's room, "pounded the walls saying words [Wyatt] could not understand," and sacrificed the animal so it could take on the "evil spirits" (49) that plagued the boy.

Not coincidentally, the sacrifice occurs on the same day that Heracles rips Aunt May's beloved Hawthorn tree from the ground; as her health fails, Wyatt's rebounds. In a sense, the very same act that instigates May's decline, the metaphorical expunging of the malignant tradition exemplified by John H. and the turning away from that repressive Puritanism, becomes the act that preserves Wyatt. Shortly thereafter, someone removes the gloomy portrait of John H. from the parlor wall and hides it away. Thus it is appropriate that the second significant stage in his turn away from Christian practice occurs at May's funeral, when some characters claim that the eulogy for his aunt "was his last really Christian service" (706).

Ultimately, Gwyon converts to Mithraism. Upon his return to Mount Lamentation, Wyatt finds his father worshiping at the sun's rise and discovers a bull in the barn that Heracles once occupied. After ritually slaying the bull, the reverend redecorates the Congregationalist meetinghouse in the style of a mithraeum and performs a Mithraic service in place of the anticipated Christmas celebration. The town finally forcibly removes him to a mental facility outside town, after he is comically apprehended inside the darkened church.

More than a joke (though Gaddis's rendering reads as hilariously funny), Gwyon's commitment to an asylum reinforces the novel's larger point. That is to say, Gwyon's Mithraic conversion reveals points of contact between so-called paganism and early Christianity. His discovery threatens to expose Puritanism as an institution with no origin grounded in reality, but rather in myth—that is, as Deleuze defines it, a simulacrum. "The simulacrum implies huge dimensions, depths, and distances that the observer cannot master" (258), Deleuze contends; Gwyon exposes the indefinable limits of early Christian practice—the very thing that Protestantism aspires to re-create. Gwyon's pursuit of the origins of the town's perceived Puritan tradition does not lead him to Judaism, which might appear the logical trajectory it would take. Instead, he chooses a faith that bears a remarkable similarity to Judaism in its practice, one that according to W. J. Phythian-Adams descended to Rome through India and Iran: shrouded in mystery, it was primarily a practice of soldiers at the outposts of the Empire.[18]

As Gaddis would have understood it, "to the outward eye the two religions of Mithras and Christ appeared to differ in accidental details only; at many important points they presented the most startling resemblances, which Christian apologists admitted with horror" (Phythian-Adams 3), and it was "the last religion of Paganism locked in that supreme struggle with Christianity,

which was to decide the spiritual hegemony of the old Western World" (5). For Mithraists, like New England Congregationalists, there was "no central supreme authority" (67), and Mithras was regarded as "the foe of spiritual impurity and godlessness" (9) depicted in symbolism drawing heavily from death and resurrection as a primary process of salvation.[19]

Unlike the Puritans Gaddis references, however, whose typological and providential approach to history subscribes to a rather straightforward theory of end times (and thus a teleological theory of history), Mithraism holds that "the forces of life . . . are, as we now see them, subject to an annual death and an annual resurrection: the two are necessarily connected as cause and effect" (Phythian-Adams 60). Put another way, "a mystical Death to the World, and a Rebirth in the Spirit were blessings which Mithras, by his representative, alone dispensed" (Phythian-Adams 88). Gwyon's preference for a cyclical, and thus repetitive, model of history is first apparent at the moment he begins to repudiate his heritage: deep in the grips of an illness of his own, he confronts a series of marble busts that he identifies as his ancestors. Striking out at them under the light of a false dawn, he reaches an uncertain epiphany: "A feeling of liberation came over Reverend Gwyon. Whether it was a release from something, or into something, he could not tell. He felt that a decision had to be made somewhere beyond his own consciousness: that he must follow its bent now, and discover its import later. There would be time" (*TR* 15). Opening the next paragraph, the narrator repeats the phrase "there would be time" just before a description of the sunrise, indicating the promise inherent in this time, while suggesting the cyclical model of temporality that the Reverend comes to embrace.[20] Such promise of renewal stands in stark contrast to the traditional Gwyon eschatology, a worldview that as much explains, as it explains away, history.

Gwyon's liberation is as much out of his family's "rock-like negligence of time's passage" as it is a release back into history: as I will argue in the next chapter, Billy Pilgrim's experience of release works with a similar dynamic. The rest of his trip, Gwyon sees, is "motion and collapse, the accumulation of time in walls" (15). Interestingly, Gwyon's conversion incites the town to remove him from the position of minister, relocating him out of the shadow of Mount Lamentation to an asylum by the name of Happymount. By name, Gaddis invokes Thomas Morton's short-lived attempt at a lighter-spirited, nominally Anglican colony in New England, Merrymount.[21] It is through this development, I contend, that Gwyon's conversion to Mithraism comes to completion. He finally breaks from his Puritan community and figuratively takes up residence in the

relatively profane confines of Morton's plantation. As in William Bradford's time, Gwyon's movement would have been a very short journey in physical distance, but a very long one in terms of belief.

The reverend's roommate at Happymount, Mr. Farisy, believes that the Vatican has hired him to arrive at a scientific description of pre-Christian Roman execution. The delusional Farisy crucifies the now-Mithraist Gwyon upside down. That his "sacrifice" would reproduce the execution of Peter (the first bishop of the Christian Church in Rome) is a subtle yet complicated suggestion on Gaddis's part: time has inverted itself, and a pagan has been martyred at the hands of a Christian.[22] Gaddis's view of time resonates with Horkheimer and Adorno's in the first chapter of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*: this crucifixion embodies the myth of secular progress. Under the banner of "science" (as is the case with the "researcher"/executioner Mr. Farisy), wolf and sheep exchange skins. That Farisy's name recalls the Pharisees, who instigated Jesus's state-sanctioned murder by adhering to strict interpretations of scripture, only underscores Gaddis's commitment to exposing the hypocrisy of the fundamentalism rising in prominence during the 1940s and 50s. It is not ironic, for Gaddis, that the once-persecuted Congregationalists who fled England became famously intolerant in the face of dissent once having achieved a precarious position of nearly absolute power.

GADDIS'S CALVINIST CAPITALISM

Though Gaddis's Reverend Gwyon ultimately rejects New English concepts of teleology, the same cannot be said for all the characters in *The Recognitions*. For Gwyon's ancestors (Aunt May included, no doubt), earthly time was to be spent in the service of preparing for the construction of God's earthly kingdom. "Anything pleasurable could be counted upon to be, if not categorically evil, then worse, a waste of time. Sentimental virtues had long been rooted out of their systems. They did not regard the poor as necessarily God's friends. Poor in spirit was quite another thing. Hard work was the expression of gratitude He wanted, and, as things are arranged, money might be expected to accrue as incidental testimonial" (*TR* 13–14).[23] The claim that financial success could be proffered as proof that one has been justified by faith is often criticized as hypocritical, but it has some warrant in documented New English beliefs. After all, if God's will is communicated both through the text of the Bible and the text of the material world, one might reasonably conclude that success manifests God's pleasure with the elect just as much as distress is the mark of his displeasure

with backsliding and sin.

As if the doctrine of Manifest Destiny were not proof that this Calvinist-inflected reading of the world became axiomatic in American historiography, Gaddis's Frank Sinisterra, the Catholic counterfeiter, finds in larger accounts of world history the same pattern of interpreting historical outcomes as expressions of God's intentions: "Historians, anxious to rescue some semblance of a system from the chaos of the past, point out that since the dawn of civilization, the center of civilization has moved westward [. . .] readying for the leap across the sea to shores of a New World, where early settlers (having thrown off that yoke of tyrannical ignorance, religious persecution) promoted a culture founded in pure reason. . . . They prospered. Hard work was the only expression of gratitude their deity exacted and money might be expected to accrue as testimonial" (494–95). Sinisterra recognizes that a perversion of Calvin's vision often produces interpretations of historical fact that are offered as tacit justifications of American Indian genocide, African slavery, and an imperial impulse that extended America far past the shores of California into the Pacific and beyond, in the European and American accounts of its own march through time.

Otto's father, Mr. Pivner, displays no concern, or even awareness, that this same perversion of both religion and historical method is offered as a justification of manipulation for personal gain in his personal gospel: Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. In sharp contrast to the Reverend Gwyon's fervor for a religious purity that outdoes even the Puritanism in which he was raised (which, if misguided, is admirable for its energy), Gaddis renders Mr. Pivner's spiritualism deeply suspect for its milquetoast pandering.

If Gwyon inverts his religious origins, Mr. Pivner replaces the Gwyon family's equation of money with evidence of justification by faith for something else: money as evidence of justification in friends.[24] Carnegie "left no doubt that money may be expected to accrue as testimonial to the only friendships worth having and, eventually, the only ones possible" (498). His "*action* book . . . decreed virtue not for virtue's sake (as weary Stoics had it); nor courtesy for courtesy (an attribute of human dignity, as civilized culture would have it); nor love for love (as Christ had it); nor a faith which is its own explanation and its own justification (as any faith has it); but all of these excellences oriented toward the market place. Here was no promise of anything so absurd as a void where nothing was, nor so delusive as a chimerical kingdom of heaven: in short, it reconciled those virtues he had been taught as a child to the motives and practices of the man, the elixir which exchanged the things worth being for the

things worth having" (498–99). For all the humor Gaddis elicits though his extensive knowledge of Christianity in this novel (and he takes equal license with all of Western Christianity: pre-Reformation, Protestant, and Catholic), he reserves a distinctive distaste for Mr. Pivner's particular version of it. For Mr. Pivner's is not a Christianity designed to serve a god; instead, it makes an idol out of capital—which is, this novel suggests, the greatest sin.

In some respects, standard theological critiques of Mr. Pivner's outlook hold. That it violates the first commandment is readily apparent.[25] And there are others: for a Calvinist (and other Reformed Christians), this privileging of action over faith is a return to a covenant of works—a fallacy of so-called papacy—over *the* covenant of faith.[26] But easily the funniest, and yet pitifully sad, indictment of Mr. Pivner's Carnegian capitalist Christianity becomes apparent in the transformation of the word of God into the word of the ad. Previously, in one of the novel's most puzzling scenes, Wyatt is tormented by his faith (and completely displaced identity) and asks his father, "*Am I the man for whom Christ died?*" (440). Then lightning strikes, and the reverend does not answer. Wyatt subsequently relinquishes his intention to become a minister and returns to New York.

Mr. Pivner faces no similar crisis: he instead listens intently to every radio pitch, reads carefully the copy of every newspaper advertisement. "It was only the human voice on the radio that stopped him, that raised his head in expectation, as though it were about to impart something of great significance to *him*. [. . .] He had been laughed at, by someone who said, —But you don't *listen* to that stuff? Why do you let it bother you? and of advertising in print,—But you don't read that stuff, do you? What do you let it bother you for?" (*TR* 502). Certainly he listens, but surely he does not let it bother him: on the contrary, he needs it to fulfill him. After all, "What was [. . .] this attentive weariness, if it was not faith?" (502). In this version of faith, Mr. Pivner harbors no doubt that he is the man for whom the ad was written.

Paralleling Wyatt's insecurity to Mr. Pivner's certainty, Gaddis thus intimates how Mr. Pivner treats every word of ad copy as if it were divine communication. This debased version of Christianity crowds out all other friendships than those from which material gain can be expected, or perhaps more accurately put, extracted (for instance, it results in Mr. Pivner's isolation). In a short Carnegie quote that stands in deepest opposition to the sense of right action advocated by the novel, Gaddis consolidates his misgivings about the conflation of capitalism with Christianity. The phrase "dashed off in a moment of

sincere feeling" (Gaddis, *TR* 502) is not, as the reader might expect, a reference to Mr. Pivner's dashing off to meet his son, but is actually culled from *How to Win Friends*. "Dashed off in a moment of sincere feeling" comes from Carnegie's description of the production of "Father Forgets," a widely reprinted fable about a man who too often finds fault with, and too scarcely praises, his young son (Carnegie 14): it is offered as evidence in the case of one of the self-help book's principal rules—"Don't Criticize." These eight words crystallize the core of Gaddis's frustration with the state of the publishing industry: his repeatedly articulated fears of a forthcoming novel factory, fabricating books assembly-line style, geared to the tastes of the largest possible audience; his anxiety that self-help books are drowning out the place for literary fiction; the marketing of authors, not their books. It strikes at the center of the novel's suspicion of modern artists and collectors, who (unwittingly) celebrate the ironic framing of a paint-stained work shirt as a genuine attempt at meaningful self-expression.[27] And it even reaches to the seat of his concern for modern social relations, wherein so few people demonstrate any concern beyond their own selves and interests.

Thus Gaddis refers to a story—not one carefully wrought but "dashed off," not cultivated over time but "in a moment," and not sprung from intellection and introspection but from "sincere feeling"—to illustrate the ostensible merits of suspending one's critical faculty in favor of "winning friends" and accruing wealth. By adhering to Carnegie's dull principles, Mr. Pivner appeals to the poorest application of reason: "Here in the foremost shambles of time Mr. Pivner stood, heir to that colossus of self-justification, Reason, one of whose first accomplishments was to effectively sever itself from the absurd, irrational, contaminating chaos of the past. Obtruding over centuries of gestation appeared this triumphal abortion: Reason supplied means, and eliminated ends. What followed was entirely reasonable: the means, so abruptly brought within reach, became ends in themselves. And to substitute the growth of one's bank account for the growth of one's self worked out very well" (Gaddis, *TR* 290–91). Mr. Pivner's work, then, is not to produce, but instead to consume, which results in the very same crisis that I contend presents an ethical impasse in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, discussed in the next chapter.

One can almost feel Wyatt shudder in revulsion. Yet Wyatt himself does not present a viable solution to the question of how to understand the place of the self in the crush of modern society; nor does Mr. Pivner's son, Otto, offer a worthwhile approach to a sincere life. Instead, each represents an extension of

his father's respective spirituality: as an artist, each fails to stand in a positive position relative to his work in his time, and is thus isolated. Like Hawthorne before him, Gaddis finds in art a means to connect with society; as with Hilda, Wyatt's and Otto's bonds to the whole are sundered by their desperate, doomed quest for an unattainable ideal.[28]

Otto's view of artistry is as simple as his father's corrupt spirituality. Whereas Mr. Pivner looks to material gains as evidence of personal acceptance—one only gets money through friends; ergo, if he has money, he must have friends—the younger believes that "the artist" is justified by his community. For Otto, ascending to the status of artist requires his friends' recognition of his status as artist, and the reality of his artfulness resides in others' appreciation of it. But in trying desperately to produce this identity for himself, Otto winds up, in large part, emulating Wyatt. He masquerades with the accouterments of experience and worldliness, affecting an injury that he tries to convince everyone was sustained in a South American revolution; his play is more or less cobbled together from sayings that, unbeknownst to him, Wyatt has absorbed and regurgitated from the myriad texts he has read; and he constantly seeks out his reflection in mirrors, hoping, one senses, to see an artist reflected back at him.[29]

As his father sells out "things worth being for things worth having," Otto sells out things worth doing in a mad dash for having done things. Otto considers the successful writer one who has sold writing, a fact made apparent when he immediately gives up his outward and visible sign of an inward artist, his sling, at the instant his "father" hands him five thousand dollars. (In a hilarious accident, Otto gets five thousand dollars in counterfeit bills from Sinisterra, whom Otto mistakes for his father, Mr. Pivner.) Money, then, becomes the ultimate signifier of his status as artist to his community, and he thinks his community will see him as an artist if it believes he has profited from his art.[30]

Otto, then, is as poisoned by capitalism as the father he has never met. Mr. Pivner's bastardized Christianity attacks like a cancer from the inside—or more aptly, leaves him spiritually bankrupt, "bored as those [advertising] words had pierced him, with the sound of the counterfeiter's drill, hollowing out the coin, and filling it with lead" (*TR* 503). At one of his lowest moments, reeling from the desirable poet Esme's rejection and the cloud of suspicion regarding plagiarism in his play, Otto retires to a bar. While seeking to find himself in the long mirror, and turning his eyes "straight before him . . . , he did not see his face for the sign Franks and Kraut *20c* was pasted on the mirror above his collar" (474).

Looking for an artist, like the Christian inspired by Thomas á Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* to find Christ's image in the mirror, he instead finds an ad. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, "it has become fashionable to link the production of mirrors during the Renaissance with the growth of modern individualism. This may hold true with the humanist Renaissance. For Baxter, Dell, and Richard Mather, the mirror radiated the divine image. They never sought their own reflection in it, as did Montaigne and his literary descendants through Rousseau. They sought Christ, 'the mirror of election,' and 'Prospective-Glass for Saints'—or rather mirror, prospective glass, and image all in one: communion meant a '*putting on of Christ*,' transforming one completely into His image. Manetti, Ficino, and Pico held up the christic mirror to show man his own splendor. The Puritans felt that the less one saw oneself in the mirror, the better; and best of all was to cast no reflection at all, to disappear" (*Puritan Origins* 18). Each in his own way, Otto and Wyatt fulfill this typological mandate of New English self-(un)fashioning. Wyatt's tries to ensure his disappearance from the mirror by displacing his reflection into the forgeries he paints. Similarly, Reverend Gwyon seeks purity of religious practice, disillusioned by Calvinism's stern moralism and conviction of man's innate depravity. His family's tradition had supplanted eternal mystery with temporal misery. Hence his turn to Mithraism, as the reverend explains: "it didn't fail because it was bad. Mithraism almost triumphed over Christianity. It failed because it was so near good. . . . That's the trouble today. No mystery. Everything secularized. No weight to anything at all" (*TR* 57). If everything is secularized, we must take him to mean that religion—and in particular the Puritanism of his past—is secularized as well. Through Mr. Pivner, however, Gaddis shows how Protestant ideology persists in the form of mid-century conformism.

With his Mithraic conversion, the narrative suggests, Gwyon wants to "recall, and summon back, a time before death entered the world, before accident, before magic, and before magic despaired, to become religion" (11–12). If the mundane and morose quality of Calvinist spiritual practice ultimately drives Gwyon to seek out the suppressed potential of Christianity's pagan roots, its inherent iconophobia sends Wyatt on a quest for a kind of purity in art. Unlike his father, who balks at the antihistoricity of his family's "rock-like negligence of time's passage," Wyatt finds comfort in the ahistorical, turning, as he does, to an idealized vision of a time long past, and one he poorly comprehends—fifteenth-century Flanders.

In so doing, Wyatt pursues a bizarre course, illuminated by contrast with Otto's. Whereas Otto searches desperately in the mirror to construct himself in the image of the artist as he believes society sees it, Wyatt wants to efface his reflection altogether by painting it into a history of artistic greatness, fabricated though that history may be. He uses his own reflection as a model for his forgeries of the Flemish Primitives—an act that denies the present for a conveniently constructed idea of the past, and an act that ultimately leads to madness.

Wyatt disdains the reality that collectors only collect art that others will pay good money for; he likewise disdains the artists who pander to the demands of the collectors, to collect what money they can. He instead turns to a time that is marked by a kind of collective production, when, he is convinced, artists simply painted for the approval of other artists. As he moves further into this self-effacement, Wyatt loses his identity—in another reference to Kempis's *Imitation*, Wyatt undertakes an imitation of his ideal artist that is similar to Otto's in practice.[31] But rather than seek validation through selling his work for material gain, he seeks instead to "lose" his reflection (or, to avoid it as much as possible, refiguring it as a character in his forgeries); he desires the approval of a group of long-dead masters.

For a while, the scheme seems to satisfy Wyatt, even as it costs him his sanity. At least he can lose himself in his "work." Given his exaggerated Puritan upbringing, the "unconscious flow" against which consciousness is produced might well also be seen as what many early New Englanders recognized as God: such a connection to totality is, as Perry Miller points out, "regeneration," or solving the basic challenge of sin. "The moment of regeneration," he asserts, was the "single goal" of Puritan spirituality (Miller, *New England Mind* 25–26). Basil recognizes Wyatt's efforts toward this aim as a fool's errand. Whereas Don Quixote projects his idealized past onto the present, Wyatt projects his ideal present onto the past. Valentine calls out this idealism for the fiction it is, pointing to the aesthetic of the Flemish Primitives as a talisman against their fears of the world's profaneness, and pointing out that their artistic endeavors were all undertaken "in a world where everything was done for the same reason everything's done now" (*TR* 698): namely, profit.

Wyatt's consistently invoked attempts to produce the "self who could do more" require him to neglect his actual self, but try as he may, he cannot slough off his being in history. With each renewed effort, he comes to the realization that "something always sticks," another phrase repeated numerous times

throughout the book. As much as Hilda, Wyatt is at a remove both from history and the social world. For Wyatt, the present is an unfamiliar time, constantly undermined by mean capitalism. He at first shirks New England for Counter-Reformation Flanders, seeing himself not as a forger, but as a member of the Flemish guild. Realizing that the guilds were little more than financially motivated cartels, he then must move further back in history to sustain his delusion that artistic production can be undertaken without the debasing impulses of the capitalist drive. Each time, he finds historically specific political economies that impede his idealist efforts. Here we find another remarkable parallel with Vonnegut's critique of contemporary capitalism, which cannot comprehend communism's "alien time sense," as I discuss further in the next chapter. Ultimately, Wyatt embraces a similar heresy to the one Hilda may not claim, but certainly practices, throughout *The Marble Faun*.

A HERESY, EACH FOR ITS OWN TIME

As Emily Schiller demonstrates, while Hilda may be a "daughter of the Puritans," she could hardly be further from an actual Puritan. For at the very center of the novel's presentation of her there is a claim for an innate innocence (through her metonymic association with the Virgin Mary), a claim that any good Congregationalist would decry as "presumption." Calvin reluctantly but insistently stressed Augustine's assertion of man's innate depravity, a state of spiritual death that can only be reversed by God's undeserved and unwarrantable grace.[32] Wyatt also seeks to maintain a position of "sinlessness" relative to his artistic production, which would require the denial of time and history.

Wyatt denies both time and history first by embracing the moniker Stephen—the name intended for him before his birth (and thus before being tainted by original sin), and before his being intruded upon by Aunt May's family history (and thus Calvinism's innate depravity)—and then by adopting Pelagianism as an identity.[33] Wyatt is introduced in his youth to Pelagianism, a spiritual practice described as people doing "just as they pleased" (Gaddis, *TR* 58). His full identification with the ancient heresy is not confirmed for another seven hundred and fifty pages, when Mr. Yák (the new name for the old counterfeiter, Sinisterra, who was responsible for Wyatt's mother's death) upbraids Wyatt (now Stephan, soon to be Stephen) for his cavalier attitude toward the Spanish police. In one of the novel's many humorous moments, Mr. Yák queries: "What did you tell the cop you're a . . . what did you tell him? A Pelagian? . . . he just wanted to know what kind of nationality you are, can't you

just say swisso? What if he asks you for your Pelagian passport?" (806). Asked to identify himself, Wyatt turns to a religious belief that denies the doctrine of original sin and thus man's inherently fallen nature. Instead, he chooses a theological position that sees sin as a product of man's actions, committed in his unfettered free will. In this way, grace is no longer God's free and undeserved gift, but rather a reward which can be earned through right action.

In contesting original sin, Pelagius nullified the necessity for faith in Jesus as Christ—or so his detractors insisted. Wyatt, like his father, turns to an opponent of Augustine in his attempt to undo religious history. But his turn against Augustinian epistemologies does not resolve his desire for absolute flawlessness. For in the end, his search for purity in painting leads him to undo the history of art, as he retires to seclusion in a Spanish monastery, "restoring" paintings to their originally blank canvases by scraping the paint away, much as he tries to scrape away the accreted, corrupting influence of history.

Hilda's artistic endeavors function similarly to Wyatt's: she creates her community with the long dead and seeks to avoid corruption throughout history by evading time. It is unclear whether or not she fully returns to her time, since, as previously noted, her new husband will always regard her as a saint. More significantly, as Tellefsen makes clear, Hilda's continued identification as sinless represents a reification of American identity as white and Protestant; this identity is willfully ignorant of its exclusionary sensibility. Tellefsen connects this identity to the novel's concerns about the impending strife over slavery and Catholic immigration. "To choose such an identity, as Hilda and Kenyon do, is to choose momentary preservation at the price of future disintegration—an identity that will crumble from marble into dust" (Tellefsen 478). In order to preserve her sense of blamelessness, Hilda must ignore (as Hawthorne claims to in his preface) the "gloomy wrongs" of her "dear native land" (*MF* 3). While Hilda is trying to secure a blameless position in history for a North on the verge of Civil War, Wyatt and Otto are trying to find themselves in a world where artistic genius is virtually synonymous with monetary value. In both cases, history constantly impinges upon the ability of the self to find its identity and value in a world that champions the self-made man and rugged individualist as the apotheosis of Americanness.

Thus both Hawthorne and Gaddis demonstrate the paradox of the ideal of self-generated individualism: the ideal American is a self without fault, yet intimately connected to, and influenced by, a specific community in a specific historical circumstance. So Hilda must imagine a blameless New England, once

populated by the blameless Puritans, to which she can return. Her notion is so naive as to appear offensive today. Similarly, Wyatt's notion of purity—one he inherits from the Hilda-like Aunt May—leads him to scour art history for its purest place and time; he ends up scouring art itself from the canvases polluted by their complicity with the corruption of capitalism.

Likewise, I cannot but see Hilda's painting as a kind of allegory of her own Protestantism: that is, her Puritanism models itself on a Christianity that at once requires a precedent in the form of Congregationalism, but then supersedes that theology by imagining herself without sin. Herein lies the core of Hawthorne's ambivalence toward Hilda, which makes Hilda such an important antecedent of Gaddis's Aunt May. Aunt May expresses her distress at her nephew's visit to the Catholic strongholds of Spain and Italy—"all those . . . those foreigners," a friend intones: "and Catholic, growled Aunt May" (4)—because she holds a longstanding Protestant distrust of Catholicism. That suspicion issues from Catholicism's hierarchy and ceremony, but also from the manner by which it puts Protestantism on a historical continuum, reminding Protestants of creed's status as a historical phenomenon. Neither Gaddis's nor Hawthorne's "Puritan" America can accept Protestantism's ancient history; if they tried to, their illusory pillars of racial purity would collapse under the weight of that history's global, multiethnic traditions. Jenny Franchot rightly points out that Protestant Americans sealed off Catholicism into an unreachable past (11–12); situating that Catholicism as the pollution from which Protestantism can be cleansed leaves the Protestant no responsibility to push further back in time to pre-Catholic "religious" or "spiritual" practices and beliefs. But *Faun* represents more than a "failed, Protestant effort to comprehend Catholicism" (Franchot 350–51); by contrasting Hilda also with the pagan "faun" Donatello and the potentially Afro-Jewish Miriam, Hawthorne resituates Catholicism in a history that does not begin with Christianity but rather with the millennia of human experiences that precede Jesus of Nazareth's birth.[34]

Later novelists—namely Vonnegut, Pynchon, Robinson, Whitehead, and Auster—offer a different approach to the Puritan myth from *The Marble Faun* and *The Recognitions*. They do not see the Puritan myth as vulnerable to critique: they instead see it as a perdurable force, inexorably tied to contemporary discourses about the meaning of Americanness. Despite Hawthorne's and Gaddis's noble ambitions to destroy the model Puritan by revealing its invented character, neither has the cultural force to dislodge such a cherished cultural relic. The writers that follow Gaddis, whom we might see as postmodern in

period (if not necessarily postmodernist), seem to relish the emptiness of the Puritan brand and the literary forms that go along with it. They offer their own content to define the signifier; knowing that they cannot beat the discourse, these books join it.

3

ALIEN ABDUCTION AS CAPTIVITY NONNARRATIVE IN *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*

Curtis LeMay said, "If we'd lost the war, we'd all have been prosecuted as war criminals." And I think he's right. He, and I'd say I, were behaving as war criminals. LeMay recognized that what he was doing would be thought immoral if his side had lost. But what makes it immoral if you lose and not immoral if you win?

—Robert McNamara, *The Fog of War*

Although *Slaughterhouse-Five* primarily focuses on the story of antihero Billy Pilgrim's coming "unstuck in time," the action of its first chapter has, on its face, little to do with that experience. Instead, it follows an unnamed first-person narrator who details his effort to write about surviving the firebombing of Dresden. Vonnegut's narrator speaks self-reflexively with great frequency throughout the novel's beginning section, then largely fades into the background. He intrudes only occasionally afterward, enough to remind the reader that it is his voice—not an omniscient one—dictating the action. From this speaker we learn that he has revisited what is now (in the timeline of the book) East Germany; that he has held interviews with his old war buddies at home; that he has gathered as many facts as possible for a veteran with no security clearance; and that he has unsuccessfully grappled with representing his own memories of the Dresden firebombing. In the process, he reconsidered the America for which he initially crossed the Atlantic and threw himself into the chaos of war. He did all the things that historians do short of writing a history: able to relate only his aborted efforts, the narrator finally concedes his attempt "had to be" a failure (22). Despite his urgent need to explain the events in Dresden, the narrator could not actually write that history.

In looking back, he became, like Lot's wife fleeing Sodom, "a pillar of salt" (Vonnegut 22). Though in possession of the facts, the narrator freezes before he can produce from them a coherent linear narrative explaining how and why

the Allies annihilated an open city, killing so many innocent civilians. Because he has failed, the narrator of *Slaughterhouse-Five* does not give us his hoped for "Dresden Book," the history of the largest single-day massacre in the world's greatest war. Nor do we get an autobiography, though some critics insist that *Slaughterhouse-Five* should be read as one.[1] Rather, we get Billy Pilgrim's story: a science-fiction novel of postwar American existence, laden with the burden of the sights and smells and injustices of industrialized death. Thus, *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s primary narrative begins with a frame tale; the novel proper is a story-within-a-story about what could not be done as much as it is a fiction of what might have been.

In contrast to historical actuality, *Slaughterhouse-Five* goes forward from chapter 1 in the subjunctive mood, ultimately crystallizing around a bizarre fantasy of revelation delivered from an alien perspective. Billy's explanation of time, as ostensibly given him by the imaginary Tralfamadorians, mocks Christian claims to a priori knowledge of existential meaning by ironizing the life of a pilgrim with no clear destination. "By shadowing *The Pilgrim's Progress* and its conversion narrative structure," Richard Hinchcliffe argues, "*Slaughterhouse-Five* appears as not simply the unique, postmodern exemplar that critics have described, but a novel that resonates with the American past" (186).[2] Hinchcliffe persuasively argues that "the allegorical landscapes of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the wildernesses created by war and capitalism in *Slaughterhouse-Five* chime . . . with the idea of Billy Pilgrim's narrative being an inversion of Christian's allegorical journey" (188). In light of the revelation that his "time traveling" is fictional and keeping in mind he attends a Dutch Reformed church, Billy's surname evokes the best-known American Christian pilgrims—the Plymouth colonists (many of whom spent a decade in Leyden before emigrating to America) and their Massachusetts Bay neighbors. It thus also evokes the stories that comprised one of that group's most popular literary forms, the captivity narrative.[3]

Billy's narrative shares many common elements with the genre whose origins are frequently traced back to colonial New England. He has close ties to his community's predominant religion (as he is a chaplain's assistant); moreover, his experiences are consistent with those of Indian abductees. He is seized during battle, moved about several times, forced to endure living conditions far outside the scope of his previous existence, reduced to eating foods he would never have consumed otherwise, confronted with the pressure to convert to another system of beliefs, and ultimately returned to the community of his birth.[4]

Unlike its New English predecessors, however, Vonnegut's novel lacks an

ethical grounding that allows its narrative to cohere in a linear sequence. The novel's first chapter parallels the framing devices often found early on in the captivity genre, and this practice of layered narrative establishes the historical context and cultural priorities of the community that Billy represents, in contrast to tropes that characterize the early American form. Because the narrator's historiographic purpose remains unspoken, rather than unmistakably asserted (as in early New English abduction accounts), *Slaughterhouse-Five* rejects the teleological narrative framing human experience as meaningful. Vonnegut's novel reveals its ambivalence toward the conditions of his time, which seem to thwart the possibility of being ethical. In so doing, *Slaughterhouse-Five* shows the Puritan myth as endowing America with an empty sense of purposefulness: invoking the master narrative of providential historiography by portraying it *in extremis*, Vonnegut demonstrates how America's seemingly secular postwar consumer culture develops from Protestant assumptions about right action.

When ethical humanism, alongside all other moral possibilities, fails, *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s narrator cannot recount his experience at Dresden as conventional narrative. In the world he describes instead, Billy elects to replace New English divine determinism with a different kind of transcendent determinism (that is, alien abduction), revealing how such modes of thinking abdicate the ethical responsibility implicated in agency and free will. He develops and expands upon one of the oldest forms of popular American prose, the captivity narrative, recast to represent the confusion and frustration of living down the legacy of World War II and living with the escalating body counts of the Vietnam War; in a wacky form of popular science fiction, *Slaughterhouse-Five* cycles back to American genre literature's origins just as the narrative cycles back on itself to highlight how little ethical progress the West has won. In this way, *Slaughterhouse-Five* resonates strongly with *The Recognitions*: merely pointing out that Puritan myths paper over an absent center to American identity leaves Billy and the narrator highly unsatisfied. It also signals the fact that, to this point, American fiction writers had not yet figured out what to do with the effects of the Puritan brand. Vonnegut and Gaddis seem to agree, nevertheless, that speaking against it is better than doing nothing at all.

CAPTIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Much like the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, the seventeenth century in New England saw rapid, radical development in both the material and political spheres. As in Vonnegut's postwar America, the northeastern colonists'

standard of living was increasing at a staggering pace, wrecking havoc on foundational aspects of the New English epistemology.[5] Additionally, the geopolitical climate was highly volatile. With dozens of nations of Native Americans in close proximity, an increasingly active French presence to the north, and civil wars reshaping the political landscape in Old England, the New English people faced the constant threat of cataclysmic change.

In the face of such uncertainty, captivity became a powerful framework that gave meaning to the New English colonists' existence. Vonnegut, his novel's narrator, and Billy Pilgrim also share the experience of being held captive by hostile forces; perhaps not coincidentally, by the time Vonnegut was training at Cornell, Perry Miller and Thomas Johnson had revived interest in Mary Rowlandson's seminal story of American Indian abduction. That Rowlandson's text served quite well to validate a broadly held New English sense of exceptionalism was demonstrated by its unprecedented success. Having been published in scores of editions (Vanderbeerts 548), it "could be considered the first early American bestseller" (Stern 378). Due to their immense popularity, first editions "were quite literally read to pieces" (Vanderbeerts 548), leaving the second edition the earliest available version of her account. Notably, it includes a "Preface to the Reader" signed simply *Per Amicum*.[6] While many critics assert that Vonnegut's framing voice in chapter 1 might be Vonnegut himself, in fact that narrator remains as anonymous as Rowlandson's friend—and, like that friend, the voice subjects Billy's larger narrative to its own ethical structure.

This voice's repeated intrusion into the Pilgrim narrative reminds the reader of its presence and influence in the narration's composition; it also creates distance between the narrator and Billy himself. Far from being unusual, the practice of framing is common in many captivity narratives. In most recorded captivity tales, the primary texts were either grounded in another, more religious and political voice (as in Rowlandson's case); anthologized in collections by similar figures (e.g., the *Magnalia* of Cotton Mather); or penned by a male hand with clearly vested interests (e.g., *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, written by James Seaver but in Jemison's voice).[7] The emergent tradition was characterized by its polyvocal artifacts, which relied on a framing principle that subjects the primary text to the religious and political motives of the framer. In both Rowlandson and *Slaughterhouse-Five* the framing device establishes the theory of history that orders the accounts to cohere into a meaningful message.

Starting in the late seventeenth century, the American reading market was

inundated with wild and vivid depictions of colonists held captive by indigenous people in the New World. As a genre, these stories dominated the literary marketplace, captivating the attention of a developing American reading public for well over a century. Since the revival of interest in "Puritan" writings following Perry Miller's advances in American studies, historians and literary critics have rethought these texts, sparking broad controversy as to the effect they had on New English Reformed Christians, as well as a good deal of disagreement about their authors' intentions. However, most scholars agree on the desired aims of the establishment that published and distributed copies of these stories: the production of a distinctly American, and, early on, a particularly New English historiography. As a form, these narratives not only served to entertain and edify the seventeenth-century reader, but they continue to grant the contemporary scholar insight into the way that the New England theocrats understood their position both in their present and their unfolding future.

Vonnegut's novel establishes its relationship with historiography during the narrator's opening chapter: he observes theses the rest of the novel ultimately resists. On his trip to visit fellow veteran Bernard V. O'Hare, the narrator describes his encounter with America's past and its production of narrative: he "went to the New York World's Fair, saw what the past had been like, according to the Ford Motor Car Company and Walt Disney, saw what the future would be like, according to General Motors" (18). In the face of these explanations, "I asked myself about the present: how wide it was, how deep it was, and how much of it was mine to keep" (18). Here, the novel paints history with a Fordist stroke, told in Disney-style voice-over, while its sense of the future issues from another prominent auto manufacturer. As to his present, the narrator has cause for concern. If any of it does belong to him, it is seemingly only so for as long as the corporate structure allows it to be. On his way to Germany to revisit Dresden, fog prevents the narrator's flight from making its connection. Describing his encounter with the faceless corporate force, he explains: "I became a non-person in the Boston fog, and Lufthansa put me in a limousine with some other non-persons and sent us to a motel for a non-night" (20). The present described on that "non-night" reads like a description of eternity in hell, with the passing of each second experienced as the passing of a year. "There was nothing I could do about it. As an Earthling I had to believe whatever clocks said—and calendars" (20). This is not the account of a liberal humanist subject moving ever closer through history to full autonomy and true freedom, nor is this God's special child, part and parcel of his community. Anticipating

Lyotard's argument that postmodernism's hallmark characteristic resides in a skepticism toward metanarratives, neither the modernist American master-narrative nor a New English providential epistemology holds true for the narrator. The real narrative revealed here is that of growing corporate power, already strong enough to reconstitute the narrator's subjectivity as an absence, as a nonhuman in a hotel room, an empty seat on a jumbo jet, a captive to corporate force.

Other characters share the narrator's concerns with the emerging post-World War II historiography. As the wife of the narrator's wartime friend, Mary O'Hare resents and resists the new typology abroad—that of the American soldier as a type of Christ sent to rid the planet of evil. She refuses the Walt Disney vision of the war, and fears the narrator will reiterate a similar version in "the Dresden Book": "you'll pretend you were men instead of babies, and you'll be played in the movies by Frank Sinatra and John Wayne or some of those other glamorous, war-loving, dirty old men. And war will look just wonderful, so we'll have a lot more of them. And they'll be fought by babies like the babies upstairs" (14). Mary's husband shares her discomfort with the ideological struggle behind the production of American history, both in popular fictional entertainment and in more official sources. Though he lived through the same events as the narrator, when asked to judge the narrator's decision to center his history of Dresden on the execution of Edgar Derby, Bernard remains unable to comment because, as he claims, "I don't know anything about it" (5). Witnessing the event does not mean he knows what happened. For Bernard, recounting the past requires a writer's abilities. In response to the narrator's queries about the proper way to retell their shared wartime memories, Bernard simply replies, "That's your trade, not mine" (5). The problem of representation looms large over the novel: the solution, if one exists, lies beyond the narrator's grasp. He concludes that the "best outline" he produces deserves that honor because it is "the prettiest"—not the most accurate or the most truthful, howsoever either might be reckoned—and this he crafts in crayon, a child's medium (5). His most successful effort to produce an account based on fact and that might aspire to truthfulness, vexed as the term may be, requires a child's naïveté, a child's ability to believe in the types of fantasy proliferated by Ford, Disney, and General Motors.

KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING

All the narrator's attempts at assessing the atrocities perpetuated to advance a

"good cause" fail to honestly factor in the atrocious means. This produces the frustration of living with the knowledge of unequalled horror, but being utterly incapable of representing it, of relieving even part of the burden. "I happened to tell a University of Chicago professor at a cocktail party about the raid as I had seen it, about the book I would write," Vonnegut's narrator explains. "He was a member of the Committee for Social Thought. And he told me about the concentration camps, and about how the Germans had made soap and candles out of the fat of Jews and so on." With characteristic ambivalence, the narrator replies: "I know, I know. I *know*" (Vonnegut 10). Despite detailing horrors that the Chicago professor did not yet know, the narrator's account did nothing to revise the typology of America as vehicle for deliverance. Relying on the familiar logic of syllogism and the law of excluded middles, America's actions in the war can be easily figured: the Germans were evil, and America opposed that evil. If America opposes evil, then it must be good. The Committee for Social Thought deflects the magnitude of the carnage in Dresden away from any discussion of America. But the repetition of "I know," along with its italic type, suggests a deep exasperation. For the narrator, knowing does not satisfy the condition of understanding. He knows the facts of German actions, but deeper questions remain unanswered. Was Dresden—were Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the firebombing of so many Japanese cities—good? In annihilating so many innocent civilians, was America actually effecting right action? Certainly, he knows, the Germans were doing evil: but for all that, where does America stand?

Rowlandson's text raises, then actually offers answers to, similarly pertinent questions. The *Per Amicum* introduction to Rowlandson's text establishes her captivity within the tradition of Deuteronomy, and serves to advance and reaffirm the predominant application of the Deuteronomic formula to order New English historiography.[8] The introduction's author sees clear parallels between Rowlandson and biblical stories of captivity, claiming that her time held captive "doth bear some resemblance to those of *Joseph*, *David* and *Daniel*; yea, and of the three Children too, the Stories whereof do represent us with the excellent textures of divine providence, curious pieces of divine work: and truly so doth this, and therefore not to be forgotten, but worthy to be exhibited to, and viewed, and pondered by all, that disdain not to consider the operation of his hands" (Rowlandson 65). Indeed, Rowlandson reads her experience typologically as she lives it; having acquired a copy of the Bible, "it came into [her] mind first to read first the 28. *Chap.* of *Deut.*" (Rowlandson 76).[9] By referencing biblical accounts of captivity, both the preface and the primary text reassert the

power and position of the New English master narrative of divine captivity as an epistemological and exegetical framework.

The genre helped cast the New English Congregationalists' experiences in the mold of rebirth into godly captivity through conversion: an understanding of captivity as the master narrative that imbued both private and public existence with a sense of God's special favor and purpose. "When the captivity of Mary Rowlandson in 1676 or that of the Gilbert family in 1780 was narrated in written form," contends Gary L. Ebersole, "these captivities became more than mere incidents in history; they became stories. Such stories are never objective or neutral accounts; they are always structured and informed in specific ways in order to give a shape and meaning to captivity" (Ebersole 9). *Slaughterhouse-Five* is not simply a war novel, but also a document of captivity that, like the colonial New English narratives, was "designed to lead the reader to reflect on larger issues of the meaning of life" (9). Vonnegut holds Billy captive to an idea of American life and history that is based upon consumption, and therefore devoid of transcendent content—a captivity he evades not so much by rewriting the master narrative as by unwriting it.

Roy Harvey Pearce shows that the captivity narrative trails ideological shifts within colonial American society. As a form it "shapes and reshapes itself according to varying cultural 'needs'" (Pearce 1), changing along with the reading audience's principal anxieties. Hence, the captivity narrative constitutes not one, but successive subgenres, each notable for its strategy of encoding contemporary ideological content. At first, "the details of the captivity itself are found to figure forth a larger, essentially religious experience; the captivity has a symbolic value; and the record is made minute, direct, and concrete in order to squeeze the last bit of meaning out of the experience" (2). Literal captivity symbolized a testing of the abductee's commitment to the religious (and political) reformers' purpose in New England, and provided an opportunity for the captive to choose: either succumb to the hopelessness and temptation of the savage wilderness, or embrace the Lord and the congregants of his church and be redeemed.[10] As cultural and historical circumstances changed throughout the eighteenth century, however, the interests of the American public turned increasingly to the secular. Economic and political considerations eclipsed the religious as a central concern of the public's, and thus the captivity narratives' discourse.[11] The typical story of captivity moved from serving as evidence of God's providences to providing eyewitness accounts of French and Indian cruelty (6).

That captivity narratives' writers "find in the experience of captivity . . . evidences of God's inscrutable wisdom" holds true for many scholars of the genre (Pearce 2); yet David Minter shows that it served a personal function for the returned captive as well. Reminding us that Rowlandson and her fellow Christians adhered to a "covenant theology," he points out that the early American captivity narratives "represented individual involvement in historical conflict" that "came, almost inevitably, to serve not only as stories prefiguring an individual's eternal fate, but also as paradigms of a larger society's story" (Minter 342). More than simply presenting the travails and return of the captive as their God's providence made manifest—thereby demonstrating to the world that nonconformists were God's elect—the narratives provided an occasion for the type of conversion experience each congregant must undergo (and articulate) for full church membership, while simultaneously serving to validate the writer's personal (if partial) "assurance" of election. Because the conversion experience served as evidence of genuine membership in the self-styled community of saints, the New English colonists needed a degree of self-confidence in their favored status. But since claiming knowledge of God's intentions would be blasphemous, one needed a degree of self-doubt as well. Minter suggests that Rowlandson's text served as solid evidence that the dissenters to Anglicanism were in fact God's covenanted nation, and that Rowlandson herself was likely numbered among the elect. Hence, Minter tells us that "Rowlandson's narrative comes to us as experience apprehended (and to be read) in terms provided by a highly developed intellectual context which defined experience on several levels at once" (344).

Consistent with tradition, Vonnegut's unnamed narrator establishes the novel's historiography in chapter 1. Instead of adopting the pat explanations of American history, however, the narrator systematically rejects all the possibilities presented, as none can answer his misgivings about the wrongs committed by the military he fought for during the war. He gives up on this type of storytelling altogether; like Bernard, he finds that telling history is not his business. Frozen into silence as he confronts the impossibility of representing his past (like Lot's wife, he too turns to salt), the narrator produces the fiction of Billy Pilgrim in an effort to find alternatives. Billy's becoming "unstuck in time" allows the narrator to represent the experience of watching one world destroyed, only to have another reconstituted without the backing of the stable, transcendental righteousness that made sense of the old order.

The normative intellectual beliefs of seventeenth-century New English

Christians involved a highly problematic stance toward their place in the physical world. Thought to be a "text" rendering evident the desires and intentions of their God when direct divine communication had long since ceased, the material world held value only inasmuch as it served as a medium for that God. The danger, then, lay in valuing the physical world in and of itself—which left many constantly struggling against the temptations of vanity.[12] One possible solution to the simultaneous attraction and revulsion created by the human need for physical things emerges in figuring captivity itself as a "familiar conception of life" (Minter 338), a master narrative that would function to justify the pursuit of the worldly as an end in itself (as in the consumerist mentality which will predominate in both Vonnegut's America and *Slaughterhouse-Five*) and as a message granting insight into God's satisfaction or displeasure with the elect. "Christians of the sixteenth and seventeenth century were still accustomed to viewing the whole of human existence under the aspect of imprisonment," Minter explains. "Christians defined the life of sin as a terrible enslavement and the life of faith in the fallen world as servitude, a 'sweet captivitie' to God" (338–39). Tara Fitzpatrick also concludes that Rowlandson emphasizes the "transience—even meaninglessness of all earthly concerns. The things of this world, Rowlandson tells us, 'are but a shadow, a blast, a bubble'" (Fitzpatrick 2). Captivity narratives, then, emphasize the persistent efforts of the early New Englanders to understand history as the unfolding of God's preordained plot and to understand their experience as proof (both to themselves and the world at large) that they were elected by God to carry it out.

While Mary Rowlandson exemplifies the Christian devotee, Billy Pilgrim believes far less ardently in the salvific power of Christ. Though Billy serves as a military chaplain's assistant, his father "had no religion" (Vonnegut 38). His mother—an organist who filled in when needed at various churches—"said she was going to join as soon as she decided which one was right," but "she never *did* decide" (38). Still, Billy had what the narrator describes as "a meek faith in a loving Jesus" (31) going into the war, perhaps stemming from the crucifix hung on his childhood bedroom wall, purchased by his mother "from a Santa Fe gift shop during a trip the little family made during the Great Depression" (38–39).

Billy's mother, confronting the fractured—and often contradictory—varieties of Christianity that attempt to order life experience into a meaningful whole, instead turns to a new function of existence emerging from the collapse of American agrarian life: consumerism. On Billy's crucifix, the narrator comments: "Like so many Americans, [Billy's mother] was trying to construct a life

that made sense from the things she found in gift shops" (39). Jean Baudrillard identifies the possibility for this cultural development in the decline of iconoclastic zeal that marked early Calvinist suspicion of representational art: "Iconoclasts . . . predicted the omnipotence of simulacra, the faculty simulacra have of effacing God from the conscience of men, and the destructive, annihilating truth that they allow to appear—that deep down, God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that deep down God was never anything but his own simulacrum—from this came the urge to destroy the images. . . . Thus this death of the divine referential must be destroyed at all costs" (Baudrillard 4–5). For Billy, the cross has no stable referent; his mother offers no variation of Christianity, no dogma, as correct. The cross may signify the person of Christ, but the person himself signifies several competing religious practices, and thus none of them definitively. Or else this version of Christ merely signifies the purpose-making function of consumerism, as the only sure association Billy can make is to the roadside stand full of other cheap plastic souvenirs. Thus, in her simple gesture, Billy's mother accidentally underscores the increasing tendency to collapse the discourse of religious and economic belief in American life.[13]

Mrs. Pilgrim belongs to a larger set of characters who rely on the things of this world to frame meaning for her. As with his childhood encounter with religion, Billy similarly never finds the chaplain he is charged to assist: upon reaching the combat zone in Europe, he enters into a world of chaos, equipped with neither adequate head protection nor footwear. Dazed and wandering aimlessly behind enemy lines, he meets Roland Weary, a man who reaches to no transcendent being to make meaning of his experiences (as Billy's chaplain would certainly have done). Rather, Weary consumes for the sake of consumption and understands his own existence as events already told in the past tense, in a present yet to come. He still "had every piece of equipment he was ever issued, every present he'd received from home," and "was so hot and bundled up, in fact, that he had no sense of danger. His vision of the outside world was limited to what he could see through a narrow slit between the rim of his helmet and his scarf from home. . . . He was so snug and bundled up in there that he was able to pretend that he was safe at home, having survived the war, and that he was telling a true war story" (41–42). Weary differs from the mythical Puritan who needs to see his present as a stage in the unfolding epic of God's kingdom come to Earth. Rather, he appeals to a typology of a far less divine nature: namely, *The Three Musketeers*. He constructs an imagined sense of camaraderie between himself and the two army scouts who would eventually abandon him (as well

as Billy, whom Weary excludes from his triumvirate). Rather than turning to Christianity as a path to salvation, Weary turns to a ready-made fiction to create a meaningful context for his own bizarre actions, a fiction wherein he labors to save Christianity.

THREE MUSKETEERS OF ANOTHER SORT

Outside of Weary's deluded compulsion to read himself and his world into a metanarrative of *The Three Musketeers*, Dumas's fictional heroes appear twice elsewhere in the novel; these times, however, they take their candy-bar form. In the first case, a female writer chews on one while glibly inquiring into Billy's experience of observing a human body "squashed" by an elevator car. The second appearance arrives with Billy's then-fiancée, Valencia, as she visits him in a Lake Placid mental facility. "She was as big as a house because she couldn't stop eating. She was eating now. She was eating a Three Musketeers Candy Bar. She was wearing tri-focal harlequin frames, and the frames were trimmed with rhinestones. The glitter of the rhinestones was answered by the glitter of the diamond in her engagement ring. The diamond was insured for eighteen hundred dollars. Billy had found that diamond in Germany. It was booty of war" (107). In many respects, the novel's critique of postwar American culture crystallizes in the Three Musketeers bars. Like so many others, Valencia was growing fat from consumption for its own sake, just like Roland Weary, whose "fat to burn" gave him enough energy to keep busy for the sake of performing meaningful action via fictive means.

The focus on Valencia's eyeglass frames fits a larger pattern of calling specific attention to the framework that structures meaning in the book. They sparkle in kind with the glitter of the diamond plundered from the wasteland of the war, the land where Edgar Derby was killed for stealing a teapot, and where (for Billy) the meaning-making function of Christic narratives died along with him. A self-conscious optometrist, Billy himself recognizes the metaphorical possibilities of his profession when he justifies proselytizing the Tralfamadorian theory of time. He sees himself as "prescribing corrective lenses for Earthling souls," whose subjection to a linear cause-and-effect concept of temporality made their lives "wretched" (29). Yet the optometrist sells more than lenses: he sells frames as well.

As the narrator tells us, "Frames are where the money is" (Vonnegut 24). The joke in the sentence "Frames are where the money is" features as an integral aspect of the Three Musketeers epistemology. Lenses require some kind

of mechanism to secure their proper functioning, in much the same way that details of any narrative are quite meaningless without their formal positioning. Recalling how the novel itself is established with a framing device that belies an empty historiography, Vonnegut's simple assessment illuminates the autotelic character of Valencia's worldview: all of her experience is framed by consumption, and right action (despite its harmful effects on her health) is judged within that framework.

It is hard to see self-serving consumption as a laudable ethical position. Certainly, Weary and Valencia are anything but ethical. If one consistent lacuna detracts from all of the attempts to find ethical humanism in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, it appears in the failure to positively define what ethical humanism actually is.[14] "Humanism" shares many slippery qualities with "Puritan," changing signification in broad strokes from era to era, in minute distinctions from thinker to thinker. Though its roots lie in classical thought, modern humanism tracks most closely back to thinkers like Erasmus and Montaigne, who argued that man, formed in the image and likeness of God, is accorded a unique and elevated position in the universe relative to all other creations. Over time, ethical humanism evolved into an ostensibly secular tradition that stems from a Kantian ethical theory, grounded in reason, and that sets people as ends in themselves—rather than systems like virtue ethics or moralism, which are grounded in dogma and reach out to transcendent principles for their authority. At the time Vonnegut was writing the tale of Billy Pilgrim, many self-described humanists denied both the existence of God and the special place accorded humanity by his divine fiat. Yet, this humanism remains "frankly and avowedly man-centered" (Edel 227), and "its man-centeredness states the truth that ethics is a *human* creation . . . expressing and servicing men's needs as they are understood at a given time" (229). If the advocates of a humanist interpretation of Vonnegut agree with Edel's definition, and their arguments suggest that they would, it is no surprise that definitions fail to appear in the scholarship that posits secular humanism as the novel's moral core. Among the many certainties expressed in Rowlandson's captivity narrative is a very clear understanding of man's needs in her time. Chief among this list is an intimate and sustained engagement with the goals mapped out by her god in the Bible. Rowlandson's story, Ebersole insists, "has been viewed by both authors and readers as a vehicle for moral improvement" (12). He claims that "Puritan captivities, then, could and did function as North American equivalents of *The Pilgrim's Progress*" (71). Rowlandson believes that without God, life is meaningless, and in the afterlife

there is hell to pay—quite literally. So she writes her history to share this moral with the world.

The moral, according to Hayden White, is precisely that thing which enables Rowlandson to narrate her tale. Vonnegut's narrator, on the other hand, gives up on his intended Dresden book, the history that "had to fail." "Far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning," White contends, "narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (1). So while oral narrative is as old as culture, narrative appears relatively recently in the tradition of Western history writing. For White, the earliest recognizable factually based histories, annals, simply list events, and the subsequent chronicles lack narrative structure inasmuch as they are bereft of the kind of closure that we expect from realistic depictions of narrated reality. Only narrative history has a plot—the beginning, middle, and end that completes a story. Nowhere is the moral purpose of narration more salient than in the early captivity narrative. Conversely, few attempts at representing the past cohere around a more ambiguous moral than *Slaughterhouse-Five*. If, as Valencia's escalating weight and girth demonstrate, consumption has become not a means to satisfying a need, but instead a need itself, then the world has become very confusing.

Such confusion does not plague the agents of global capital as Vonnegut depicts them: in *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s first chapter, Walt Disney and the Ford Motor Company can and do still narrate the past as narrative history. In order for the Walt Disney moral to hold, the story of America must be primarily an ethical story of spreading freedom under the watchful eyes of a loving God. But neither the narrator nor Billy Pilgrim can trust in that God. They have seen Dresden burn, they have witnessed firsthand the destruction caused by man in World War II. They have seen Edgar Derby shot dead in the ashes of tens of thousands of innocent civilians for the price of a teapot, while history is left to be filtered and re-presented by the very executors of the massacres; the information not labeled "secret" (Vonnegut 11) is left to be told by academics like the Committee for Social Thought and the Harvard professor, Rumfoord, with a commitment to ideology as much as to truth.

In effect, Dresden sets Billy and the narrator entirely free, released from the "sweet captivitie" that framed Rowlandson's existence into a meaningful experience. But with this freedom comes the responsibility to find a new structure of meaning production, one within which to frame his experiences. Such an

attempt is highly problematized in the capitalist America of *Slaughterhouse-Five* by the persistence of grand narratives that mask consumption as something greater; in no way, however, can secular humanism hold up to Vonnegut's unflinching gaze on the Vietnam era. In what is widely regarded as one of the last century's most important tracts on ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre attacks Kantian humanism, asserting that "questions of ends are questions of values, and on values, reason is silent; conflict between rival values cannot be rationally settled. Instead, one must simply choose—between parties, classes, nations, causes, ideals" (*After Virtue* 28). Ultimately, Kant's brand of consequentialism fails because it conflicts with its own insistence on rationalism; one cannot rely on reason to insist that any one end—in this case, the single human life—is worth more than anything else. This absence of reason, despite humanism's utter reliance on reason, is the catalyst for the frustration that drives Vonnegut's novel.

The ethical problem Vonnegut finds in capitalism resonates with MacIntyre's analysis of humanism; the uncertain provenance of value causes the narrator's inability to find sufficient moral ground to write his history. Consumerist capitalism positions man in an indeterminate position with regard to means and ends. Returned from the war, Billy's only clear purpose is to consume and to inspire consumption. Right action, in this system, is to drink soda and sell eyeglass frames. Yet Kantian humanism insists people be treated as ends and not means, so right action is to do the best one can by other people. Thus, individual people become both means (purveyors) and ends (consumers), and such an equation defies reason. If, as Edel posits, humanism is supposed to respond to people's needs at a given time, then consumerism merely creates more needs under the guise of satisfying them. Thus, the narrator identifies nothing ethical possible in the system he describes, and therefore cannot write his history of Dresden: he simply does not know the moral of the story and has no ethical position to defend against contrary accounts.[15]

Vonnegut's Pilgrim does not progress—he bounces from one moment to another, with no respect for linear progression. In fact, his story begins and ends in the same place, on the same page, before it is even really told: that information is spelled at the end of the frame tale in chapter 1. All this raises the question: what then is the story of Billy Pilgrim, and what does it do? For one, it allows for an understanding of the present outside the limitations of simple cause-and-effect thinking. Hence Billy connects war-ravaged Germany with the wasteland of Ilium's African American neighborhood; though he simply drives away when a black man reaches out to him at a stoplight, he can at least see

how the race riots of the late 1960s led to subsequent urban renewal projects. In Billy's America, the displacement of people from their homes to serve the interests of capital eerily rehearses the Indian removal policies that began in colonial times as a solution to perceived scarcity of land, rather than aspiring to broad-based economic mobility that (as Colson Whitehead indicates in *Apex Hides the Hurt*) would restructure urban life with economic opportunity as its driving mechanism.

ALIEN CAPTIVITY NONNARRATIVE

Hayden White's theory of historiography offers a possible explanation for motives underpinning Billy's unconventional narrative form. In establishing the cultural universality of the impulse to narrate, White speculates that "narrativity could only appear problematical in a culture in which it was absent—or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused" (White 1). *Slaughterhouse-Five* enacts such a fantasy: a story wherein a human clashes with an extraterrestrial culture to which sequential narrative is alien. Vonnegut explores the possibility of living outside linear narrative through his formal experimentation. He has created the captivity nonnarrative, and in so doing developed something more akin to a captivity chronicle that, unbound, was dropped on the floor and reassembled without care.

In inventing his alien sense of temporality, which suppresses even the possibility of right action (indeed, if all actions have always already happened, agency is a human misperception), Billy identifies not a solution for the discovery of a new system of ethics, but a place to begin the questioning that could challenge Christianized Western reason and divine providence as exhaustive explanations of how history works. Billy's roommate in the Lake Placid hospital ward for mental patients, Eliot Rosewater, offers a starting point in the form of science fiction. "Rosewater was twice as smart as Billy, but both he and Billy were dealing with similar crises in similar ways," explains the narrator. "They both found life meaningless, partly because of the war" (Vonnegut 101). The narrator carefully notes that the two men's perceptions of the meaninglessness of postwar life stem only partly from their experiences in the war. History and psychology's failure to structure their lives purposefully prompts Rosewater's insistence that "you guys are just going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful *new* lies, or people aren't going to want to go on living" (101). Absent succor from their psychologists, both Rosewater and Billy forge ahead on their own. Both were

"trying to reinvent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help" (101).

White contends that all narrative owes its coherence to fiction. Billy's kind of fiction is not necessarily immoral—it is only immoral within an ethical framework that deems it so. The myth of Tralfamadore allows Billy to reimagine time not as an emerging sequence, but as an already given course of events that can be experienced and analyzed in radically new ways. One possible source for the "alien" narrative form he produces might be the Communism the novel repeatedly invokes. Not only does the narrator traffic with East German Communists in the novel's opening chapter, but Billy attends a lecture wherein a US marine major advocates bombing the Viet Cong "back to the Stone Age, if it refused to see reason" (60). As a *Time* article put it in the years leading up to *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s publication, "communism's lumbering one-way march through history was an 'alien time sense,'" contrasting with America's attitude that time was "raw material for whatever project was before us" (Cullather n.p.).[16] Kennedy and Johnson saw that project to be "winning in Vietnam by nation-building it 'into the twentieth century'" (Cullather n.p.); according to Kennedy's own rhetoric, that twentieth century would be modeled on the American city upon a hill.

Tralfamadorian temporality permits movement backward to a time before the West had cast the world in the rigid binary of good and evil as the primary taxonomy for adjudication. The Judeo-Christian myth of the fall of man figures largely in the formulation of Billy's wartime epistemology, as is evident in his capture; he is apprehended by a group of irregular military members, whose regular army leader was a corporal wearing a pair of cavalry boots plundered on the Russian front. The narrator relates that "one time a recruit was watching him bone and wax those golden boots, and he held one up to the recruit and said, 'If you look in there deeply enough, you'll see Adam and Eve.'" Though Billy "had not heard this anecdote," he nevertheless "stared into the patina of the corporal's boots [and] saw Adam and Eve in the golden depths" (Vonnegut 53). Although on opposing sides of the war, both Billy and his captor see God's first human creations as described in Genesis. Billy finds in the tableau of the prelapsarian world a peace and innocence that engenders love in his heart. After viewing Edenic splendor, he shifts his eyes up to the face of a fifteen-year-old blond boy, a member of the captors' party. The boy, a "blond angel," a "heavenly androgyne," was "as beautiful as Eve" (53). Here we can see how Rosewater and Billy's frustration originates in the oversimplification that the Genesis

myth perpetuates on Western culture. The patina on the "golden boots" symbolizes idealist thought; it is not the boots (the material stuff of the world), but the gloss produced by polishing, the system of ordering knowledge, that assesses and creates value and meaning. Thus, the myth of Eden is one in the set of "lies" that Rosewater insists the authorities of culture and meaning must update if we are to keep on wanting to live—for it is the myth of the Fall and its simple binary thinking that makes Dresden defensible as an act of "good." Billy's capture prompted a return to a time when even the simplest binaries did not hold—the young boy has the beauty of a woman, and is neither male nor female. The Tralfamadorians he invents, too, eschew traditional Western gendering. His invented alien captors reveal that they have witnessed as many as "*seven* sexes on Earth, each essential to reproduction" (114), which represents another of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s attempts to deconstruct Judeo-Christian binarisms in the service of advocating an originary multiplicity.

Out of all possible "lies," strangely, Billy chooses alien captivity. Eventually, we come to find that Billy has invented his whole reality: the Tralfamadorians were borrowed from a Kilgore Trout novel; his only time spent with actress Montana Wildhack takes place in a porno shop in Manhattan, as he stares at her image. Given all the freedom in the world to reinvent his reality, Billy chooses captivity yet again. He dreams of no escape from his Tralfamadorian habitat, a condition with which he seems immensely pleased. Vonnegut's novel has not escaped the tyranny of the metanarrative, all relevant postmodernists aside.[17] Though a few, like Billy and Eliot, may find these grand narratives suspicious, most people rarely notice them. Valencia, Roland, the University of Chicago professor, and others accept the narrative unquestioningly—and go on eating, and go on buying, and go on living. Eliot and Billy simply just make up new narratives to suit their own needs.

Hence, Billy creates his new "lie," the story of Tralfamadore and its correction to the human perception of time. Not surprisingly, the Tralfamadorians' claims echo Augustine's theory of earthly and heavenly temporalities as articulated in Book Eleven of *City of God*, wherein the earthly city experiences complexity and change while the time of the eternal city never moves. Claims that everything has already happened diminish human agency; for Billy, the Tralfamadorians ease his sense of responsibility in the face of race-based economic caste systems and unceasing militarism at home and abroad. History, in this theory, understands the present as determined prior to experience—much as narratives about Puritanism reinforce the sense that the outcomes of

seventeenth-century history as observed from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were always encoded in the elements that led to their emergence. If all outcomes are given in origins, rather than contingent, then Billy need not feel responsible for effecting change. He can ignore the devastating policies that make so many black people poor and Vietnamese and Cambodian people pawns in political wars between diverging economic theories.

Billy's fiction takes the form of alien abduction: it should be looked upon as the newest instantiation of the captivity narrative in the American imaginary. In *Aliens in America*, Jodi Dean contends that the postwar space program reinvented "wilderness" narratives for a contemporary purpose. The study of the UFO phenomenon and alien abduction connects "to the broader theatrics of space played out in the United States since the Cold War. . . . Emerging out of a tradition of stories about the 'frontier' experience, the American exploration of outer-space came to be linked to the achievements of technology and democracy" (Dean 19). Dean insists that the "free world" assumed the image of space flight as an indication of its inevitable triumph over the threat of Soviet Communism. Like the frontier tales of old, America's conquering of the "final frontier" served as evidence of the self-identified exceptionalism originally born in the post-Cotton Mather historiography that fueled Manifest Destiny and the subjugation of Native Americans in the western United States. Reinventing the Davy Crockett genre, the theater of space exploration is overcoded (to borrow a Deleuzean term) by the larger narrative of the inexorable movement toward freedom and complete personal autonomy—precisely the metanarrative posited by Lyotard as the frame that crystallizes meaning in America before postmodernism. Dean shows a metonymic connection between the overcoming of gravity and what Lyotard describes as the "emancipation from everything that prevents [someone] from governing itself" (Lyotard 34).

"More than an alien story," abduction narratives are "a symptomatic or extreme form of what is widespread in everyday life at the millennium" (5). These tales, Dean avers, and the actvists who study them, perhaps unknowingly bonded closely with a political struggle that sought to establish what constituted knowable facts and accepted knowledge. Reports of UFO sightings and alien abduction (in the 1950s and 1960s) struggled against outright dismissal by seeking to garner credibility via normalized practices of truth-making. Advocates applied methodologies previously central in casting suspicion on their own evidence as a means to hopefully validate newly discovered witnesses. As such, thorough medical, psychological, and technological (i.e., polygraph)

examinations tried to establish the believability of "experiencers" and abductees. Dean claims that this process, while working to create space for ufologists in the larger scientific community, served primarily to reinforce the dominant discursive practices of the era: truth and fact are only achievable through such-and-such a method, as predetermined by those that claimed to have purchase on all that was knowable at the time. Abduction in the early Cold War era, Dean shows, is political inasmuch as it sheds light on the hegemonic epistemological praxes of its time.

In appealing to the wilderness genre, Dean overlooks the productive connections to New English captivity tales. But her own astute observations render these connections more than viable. Notably, *Aliens in America* demonstrates that alien abduction accounts are framed—like Rowlandson's and Billy Pilgrim's stories—in the voice of a larger community. In what she calls the "'givenness' of the connection between UFO and conspiracy," the community of believers emplaces stories of UFOs and alien abduction into "something so taken for granted it need not be said, something so obvious that it can function as a framing or connecting motif" (30). In the same way that early American captivity narratives were offered as evidence of God's machinations, the alien abduction tale is held out as proof that "They" are working to keep something secret from "Us." Like Vonnegut, Dean demonstrates Disney's investment in the production of a narrative vision, though it may serve little legitimating purpose for ufologists. In the wake of the successful film *Independence Day*, Dean writes, "Walt Disney World added a new attraction, the Extra-TERRORestrial Alien encounter. Disney invited abductees to promote it" (3).

If New England's captivity narratives created a worldview that reminded its audience that it was always already held captive by God, the alien abduction tale suggests that, at any time, we could be swept up by another kind of being: perhaps not all powerful, but a damn sight stronger than humans. For Billy, this demands resignation, a passive mentality that elides considerations of free will. In the reconfiguration of time his fiction affords, Billy can see a war movie "about the American bombers in the Second World War and the gallant men who flew them" backwards, thus witnessing the undoing of war's devastation, the disassembly of weapons—and the return to the innocence seen in the German corporal's boots (Vonnegut 74). "That wasn't in the movie. Billy was extrapolating. Everybody turned into a baby, and all humanity, without exception, conspired biologically to produce two perfect people named Adam and Eve" (75). In his new estate, unstuck in time Billy can see how it is that the

story of World War II begins with the myth of Adam and Eve. If only he can move his worldview back, to a time before the world was cordoned off into necessary opposites, he might find a new way to make sense of the world.

In the end, *Slaughterhouse-Five* may not know the answer to the problems posed by an ethical deception perpetrated in the service of consumerism, but it cannot abide inactivity. In the process of beginning to question, Vonnegut's novel builds a new lie, one that acknowledges its own failure, and in so doing is at least more honest than the lie the narrator was living before. In reframing a powerful Christian master narrative around the problem of people self-justifying means with ends, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the first of several contemporary American novels that give "Puritan" forms of expression new, differently nuanced content. Thomas Pynchon follows shortly after by apprehending and reworking another such form: the conversion narrative, the proof-text of the Congregationalists' belonging to the community of visible saints.

4

THOMAS PYNCHON, THE SLOTH OF SALVATION, AND BECOMING CONVERTED

The hand of Providence creeps among the stars, giving Slothrop the finger.
—Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

Slaughterhouse-Five describes prisoners' facilities in Dresden just before the American firebombing that annihilated the city "as a shelter for pigs about to be butchered" (152). As it turns out, the entire German city becomes a holding pen and most of its residents are killed. Allied bombers obliterate the city with incendiary bombs; fire leaves a landscape resembling the "face of the moon" (180). The protagonist of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tyrone Slothrop, endures the terrors of German bombing in London; he then finds the Occupied Zone of war-torn Europe similar to the way Billy Pilgrim found Dresden after the American and British attack: the map of the Zone reads like a map of the moon, suggesting arbitrary distinctions which are meaningful only from a distance.

In the face of totalizing devastation, the narrators of these novels face similar frustrations, attempting to apprehend the meaning of events and the motivations of individuals who executed such apparent evil under the banner of effecting good, and trying to comprehend their present after everything they knew was overturned. Perhaps not surprisingly, both narrators seem to offer one impossible solution. Just as *Slaughterhouse-Five* conjures the image of a dramatic war film running backward, *Gravity's Rainbow* imagines the Blitz in reverse: "faired skin back to sheet steel back to pigs to white incandescence to ore, to Earth. But the reality is not reversible" (*GR* 139). In Vonnegut's vision, Billy Pilgrim extrapolates his backward film to a time before the Fall, before mythical authority defined the world into overly simplified terms of good and evil. Spectro's script runs backward not through a religious sequence but through one of manufacture: from guns and bombs and rockets, to "pigs" of impure iron ore,

then to the fires that separated the metal from its originating Earth.

"But the reality," Pynchon reminds us, "is not reversible." Pilgrim quiets his anxiety about postwar life into a "new lie," suppressing the teleology of Christ's second coming and the resolution of the earthly into the divine, in favor of a quasinuclear fatalism that justifies ethical inertness. The narrator of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, too (the unnamed "I" who is also a veteran of Dresden), admits failure instead of attempting to narrate his past and thus find a moral in the war. His story is scattered, jumping around in time, reflecting the narrator's fractured and incoherent vision of the world. But neither the official histories nor Vonnegut's nonnarrative account of the postwar world resolves satisfactorily the problem of accounting for America's complicated past and uncertain present.

Indeed, technological production cannot be undone, but the narratives of national identity giving these technological innovations meaning and purpose can be reversed. So Pynchon's novel also runs backward through historical narrative forms. Rather than reverting to pigs of iron ore, the narrator leads his readers back to the pigs of the novel's New English heretic William Slothrop, colonial America's first Slothrop and the proselyte of a salvific sloth. Though this recovered account will be no less limited in its claims to truthfulness, it can tell a story that would refigure value away from vectors of profit and power, and on to a trajectory that privileges life and human dignity. In order to do so, *Gravity's Rainbow* presents the devolution of Tyrone Slothrop, a character overdetermined by scientists' experiments on him during his childhood as well as the selective memory of his nation's history.

Much like *The Recognitions*, *Gravity's Rainbow* resists easy summary. By and large, the novel tells of an American abroad, Slothrop, as he uncovers an international conspiracy that links his phallic erections to the locations of V-2 rocket strikes terrorizing London during the Blitz. In the aftermath of the European theater's worst fighting, Slothrop chases the elusive Rocket 00000, an experimental technology that would interface human beings with combat technology. Slothrop realizes that much of his whole life, in one way or another, has been shaped by an extensive interest in his sexuality and his racial fears. As "Infant Tyrone," he was subjected to Pavlovian experiments while the compound Imipolex G was developed; while in England, British military intelligence operatives probe his unconscious to uncover fears of rape at the hands of black men. As he moves deeper into the Occupied Zone of Europe, attempting to determine his place (as well as his possibility for free will) within this conspiracy, Slothrop loses touch first with his Americanness and then with his humanity,

becoming the superhuman "Rocketman" and then subsequently a humanoid pig from a folk tale. Finally, he seems to escape corporeality altogether, transforming into something like a mythical entity; in this form he motivates a subversive "Counterforce" that would resist the multinational military-corporate entities bent on exploitation and destruction.

Slothrop remains haunted by a family history that defines America through exclusion rather than inclusion. By undergoing the steps that mark the conversion experience of New England's Congregationalists, Slothrop moves backward in his era's narrative of the West to a time before America. This narrative endorses a subjunctive reconstitution of his lived reality, a possible present that rejects the exclusive and reductive binaries of the now-settled Puritanism. It also resists the increasing bureaucratization of daily life and the dehumanizing privileging of technology. By refusing to simplify his worldview into one of the already given frameworks that were in place in the prewar period, Slothrop embraces a world-making waffling and discovers a way out of the complex of military might, corporate collusion, and outmoded and misdirected conventions of history written only by the most winning winners.

Against stasis, Slothrop offers repeated and continual conversion as a lived being always becoming. If conversion represents turning away from one fallacy to a new truth, the novel suggests, people should remain open to the possibility for newer revelations to render obsolete the once newfound certainties. Thinking like Slothrop requires constant rethinking, which means that conversion should inspire future conversions. Unlike Gaddis and Vonnegut, whose uncertainties regarding how to resist American history's abuses manifests as frustrated confusion, Pynchon embraces indecisiveness and revision as a productive challenge to the prevailing order his novel works to replace.

FROM PIGS OF ORE TO PIGS OF YORE

To understand Thomas Pynchon's approach to the Puritan origin myth, one must consider the first New English Pynchon's time, when radical Protestants controlled political power in both Old England and New.[1] In 1650, Thomas Pynchon's first American ancestor, William Pynchon, published a pamphlet entitled *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption*. For New England, it was a relatively brief tract: at only one hundred fifty-eight pages, it takes the form of a dialogue between a confused "Tradesman" and an ostensibly enlightened "Divine" who argues that Jesus did not suffer God's wrath in atonement for the sins of the elect, nor did he descend into hell, as the Nicene creed holds. Rather,

according to William Pynchon's "Divine," while God did permit the devil to test his most devout acolyte, Jesus's suffering was attributable only to Satan. In a sense, *Meritorious Price* claimed that Christ's suffering on the cross in the gospels resembles Job's experience in the Old Testament. New England's power brokers disagreed with his conclusions: America's first Pynchon was a far better merchant, they thought, than a theologian.

Historically, Pynchon's treatise has been largely overlooked; his name rarely appears in the most significant studies of New England's Christian roots. But recent scholarship has shown that his attempted articulation of a nonconformist orthodoxy, like most controversial texts, tells us much about the time in which it was published; and what the controversy tells us about colonial America clarifies significant points. As Michael P. Winship points out, the puritans in England were not accustomed to real political power, and prior to the Cromwellian coup they forged ahead as a loosely configured group bound less by modest resemblances in core beliefs than by shared oppression and suffering.[2] History shows countless times that those on the margins can gloss over differences, while those differences are magnified when the previously marginalized come to occupy the center. Such was the case in England in the mid 1600s: "An ever-increasing common repression before the civil wars of the 1640s perhaps put a brake on the escalation of theological confrontations among Puritans, but within a decade after the civil wars removed that brake the putative doctrinal unity of the movement was visibly and finally sundered" (Winship, "Contesting Control" 799). The struggles for orthodoxy in England had an instructive influence on the New English theocrats and intensified what was already a long history of extreme intolerance in the face of controversial opinions. Their reactions to controversy were often swift and unequivocal—and as a result, sometimes imprecise. Many denounced Pynchon's mild foray into religious debates as a kind of Socinian heresy, judging by the title page.[3] They incorrectly concluded that Pynchon denied the divinity of Jesus and that he believed Christ to be merely an exemplary human no more a part of God than any other person (Gura, "Contagion" 470–71). To quash the spread of such allegedly dangerous ideas, the books were quickly rounded up and burned at Market Place in Boston by the town executioner. Shortly thereafter, in the terms selected by his more famous descendant, Thomas Pynchon, describing the treatment of the fictional William Slothrop, Pynchon was 86'd from Massachusetts.

No one really knows just how influential William Pynchon's vision for New English Christianity was for *Gravity's Rainbow*. After all, the William

Slothrop of *Gravity's Rainbow* is portrayed as a mere ship's cook *cum* pig farmer; a hillbilly espousing theological conclusions derived from his observations of the movements of swine; an outsider who, as John Krafft notes, was "presumably one of the saints," but who "stood in a subordinate relationship which was theological as well as social to the 'more elect'" (58). This representation of Slothrop, if it purports to represent the historical William, contrasts starkly with the facts. Robert Daly explains: "Pynchon was a prosperous merchant and influential member of the Puritan community, so influential that when, in the winter of 1629–30, Winthrop makes up his short list of those he hopes will come with him to America, Pynchon is on it; so influential that, sailing aboard the *Ambrose*, he is brought over to the *Arbella* to dine with Winthrop and the captains of the fleet, the only person named in the account; so influential that, in 1640, the town of Agawam changes its name to Springfield in honor of Pynchon's home town back in Essex. He is one of the authorities, and he may be the only person in American history to have defied Thomas Hooker, of whom it is said he could have put a king in his pocket" ("Burned" 206). In short, William Pynchon and William Slothrop are not one and the same. Nevertheless, both the fictional character and the historical figure remind us once again that there were many versions of what is currently regarded as American Puritanism. William Pynchon's expulsion reintroduces the historical multiplicity at the core of America's Puritan myth—a difference that came to the fore after the radical reformers obtained sufficient political power to effect their desired reorganization, in both England and New England, if only briefly.

Both Pynchons' texts highlight the unsettled reality of the dissenters' putative orthodoxy, and therefore both religious theory and practice were open to wide interpretation. Winship argues: "Approaching old age in Massachusetts, Pynchon saw in the flux of the civil wars period and in the reemergence of issues he had grappled with more than a quarter of a century earlier the opportunity to publish his views. The resulting controversy . . . reflected orthodoxy's now openly fractured state. [William] Pynchon thus provides . . . continuity between contestations for the slippery center in Jacobean England to the shattering of that center, felt all the way from London to frontier English North American villages in the middle of the seventeenth century" ("Contesting Control" 799). While the allied reformers may have disagreed about the details, those details could be critical elements of belief that thwarted attempts at codifying transcongregational concordance.

William Pynchon's controversy indicates the actual experience of

seventeenth-century New English religious politics: hitherto loosely allied divines agreed in the face of something with which they all vehemently disagreed, and the limits of anything resembling orthodoxy were most clearly drawn by those who numbered themselves among the "godly," but whose ideas nevertheless offended the beliefs of New England's ruling elite. As I explained in chapter 1, "Puritanism" as a term works as a retrospective writing of narrowly defined outcomes onto a complex of people whose belief systems varied, both within generations and across the decades. *Gravity's Rainbow* finds opportunity in this complexity by revitalizing a suppressed strain within America's religious history and recovering a rejected potential Puritanism from the past for the novel's present. In this account, the novel revalues sloth, translating the deadly sin into a context wherein its characteristic ambivalence becomes a productive stance of resistance against dogmatism. By salvaging William Pynchon's definition of New English Christianity from history's scrap heap, *Gravity's Rainbow* ultimately challenges many presuppositions about the past that predominate in settled views of Puritans—presuppositions grounding so many of our assumptions about the present.

This chapter will argue that Slothrop's experience in the first third of the novel exhibits many characteristics of the typical New English Christian's conversion experience, affording a reading of the novel's present within, and then against, the framework of the Puritan mythology. Pynchon—like Vonnegut, Marilynne Robinson, Paul Auster, and Toni Morrison—redeploys a New English form of expression in a modern context, capitalizing on the myth by reinvesting the signifier "Puritan" with complex, confusing, and optimistically inclusive content. As *Gravity's Rainbow* rejects New Englanders' predominant, reductive method of reading reality as binary, it affirms the positive uncertainty precipitated by sloth: what the Anglican dissenters saw as sinful action becomes, in Pynchon's novel, a necessary position in the face of so much uncertainty in the postwar world. Rethinking—either the seemingly known or certainties that change within altered contexts—results in repeated conversions, a nearly constant process of rediscovering and redefining the self against agents and institutions that would pit individual persons against humanity itself.

PYNCHON'S POLYSEMOUS WITCHES

Fans of *Gravity's Rainbow* will recognize that the Puritan myth serves as just one of many frames its characters rely upon in their attempts to make sense of the war's apocalyptic reordering of reality. In a manner similar to Slothrop's questioning of the Elect/Preterit divide, characters such as Roger Mexico,

Brigadier Pudding, Edward Pointsman, Weissmann, and Franz Pökler (to name just a few) also import highly developed worldviews from prewar times into the detritus of their present. Like Slothrop, all of these characters either lose faith in the efficacy of their systems to provide meaning for their lives or they lack faith in these worldviews from the outset.[4] None of these old models, if they ever did function to make sense of the world, is successful in ordering the new postwar reality.

Like many Calvinists, whose thinking evolved from the German Martin Luther as well as the eponymous Frenchman, the SS's Captain Weissmann (a.k.a. "Captain Blicero") subscribes to an ancient German master narrative to embed his experiences in a meaning-making frame.[5] Weissmann ("white man" in English) plays a significant role in developing the Rocket 00000: though they never meet, one might argue that Weissmann is Slothrop's principal antagonist. During his time at Peenemünde (the site of the Germans' V-2 development and production program) he holds the Dutch woman Katje Borgesius and the German soldier Gottfried captive to a sexual bondage likened to the "Hansel and Gretel" narrative: "though it is never discussed among them openly, it would seem Katje, Gottfried, and Captain Blicero have agreed to this Northern and ancient form, one they all know and are comfortable with—the strayed children, the wood-wife in the edible house, the captivity, the fattening, the Oven—shall be their preserving routine, their shelter, against what outside none of them can bear—the War, the absolute rule of chance, their own pitiable contingency here, in the midst" (*GR* 96). As with the New Englishmen's narrative of predestination, Blicero's Hansel and Gretel storyline also refuses chance in favor of an ostensibly given conclusion. It ensures the semblance of control over Weissmann's fate even though that fate takes the form of the group's demise at the hands of his own tyranny.

Weissmann's sections of course do much more than just clarify Slothrop's worldview; this chapter, however, explores the lexicon of New English Christianity in Pynchon's postwar context. Though the novel portrays Weissmann as one of Them—that is, the agents comprising the malignant power structure—Weissmann sees himself as elected to damnation, to suffer in the fires of the oven as a backsliding Congregationalist would suffer the fires of hell. Weissmann's paradoxical self-selected "fate," election to perdition, places Weissmann's character in at least two opposing positions. Not simply in one or the other category, the German captain sees himself as both one of and subject to the book's haunting "Them."

The fourteenth episode of Part One, which describes Weissmann's

exploitation of Katje and Gottfried, occurs at a threshold in Slothrop's character development. By this time, Slothrop has repeatedly acknowledged his Puritan ancestry, but he has not yet experienced what I argue is his conversion to a perverse version of it, or what Marilynne Robinson later defines as a "better model" for it. Throughout the section, the narrator deploys numerous terms and phrases from the lexicon of New English theocrats, an insider codifying his language to both evoke and resist New English attempts to describe the world in their theological image. In this way, the narrator presents another attempt to account for the war, in this case a metanarrative figuring a kind of election that is simultaneously preterition—the middle position of both-and—when Weissmann sees himself as "elected" to destruction from a shove in the back into the Oven.

Weissmann's captivity of Katje and Gottfried invokes terms common to Pynchon's Puritanized discourse, and it recalls key aspects of Slothrop's colonial past. The German captain punishes Katje and Gottfried with "his own 'Hexeszüchtigung'" (95), a traditional whipping punishment common for witches during the Inquisition: in this way, they become both lost children and suspected witches.[6] Responding in a style associated with European and Catholic paranoia, and not the English world's punitive hanging, Weissmann both invokes and rejects the familiar American trope of the Salem Panic (an event to which Slothrop is tied through ancestry, we find out later). Additionally, the narrative describes Weissmann's captives as children and expresses his concern for their "improvidence" (99). Anticipating Slothrop's appeal to "providence," a product of his ancestors' religious beliefs, Weissmann calls attention to the root word's historical grounding in pre-Christian thought.

These allusive, fraught terms bring discursive fields into contact. At the same time, they work to expose the limitations of the totalizing Elect/Preterit binary. By revealing the broad range of signification inherent in the terms that might function to distinguish the Puritans as a discernibly unified group, *Gravity's Rainbow* offers another attempt at utilizing an antique model to apprehend the world. Weissmann, too, allegorizes his existence, echoing the kind of typology seen in the American tradition from Bradford to Ronald Reagan and beyond, as I argue later in chapter 6.

Though Weissmann and Slothrop oppose each other in almost all respects—their interest in the production of the rocket and its potential value for advancing their causes; their intentions toward their fellow humans; and myriad other "ends"—the soldiers connect through their shared language. With

characteristically Pynchonian complexity, though, their common diction comprises a set of identical signs that point to differing concepts. In so doing, these signs point to a world of words and meanings characterized by indeterminacy. Thus, the terms codifying human experience are rendered plural in meaning, giving plurality a central rather than a marginal position in the book's postwar world.

AN UNCERTAIN CONVERSION

Ultimately, Weissmann errs in predicting his future (just as the Puritan myth fails to help Slothrop make sense of his postwar experiences). Katje does indeed betray him, but not at the personal level that he seems to long for: she simply slips away into British custody. Even though he finds a replacement for Katje in the form of Greta Erdmann, he is not shoved into the Oven, literally or figuratively. He instead succeeds in building and launching his Rocket 00000, with Gottfried inside and the sought-after human/rocket interface active. Ironically successful in developing the cyborg weapon, Weissmann fails in his fantasy. His Hansel and Gretel play dissolves, since the war and its aftermath (as Pynchon consistently reminds us) resist comprehensibility in such familiar and reductive terms.

The details revealed about Weissmann serve as background to another plot, wherein Osbie Feel and Edward Pointsman—agents of an Allied team interested in Slothrop's sexual response to the rockets—conspire by training Octopus Grigori to "attack" Katje at the Casino Hermann Goering. They hope to provide reasonable ground for Slothrop to forge a connection with the beautiful Dutchwoman in the form of a dramatic rescue, and though the plan works, its machinations are not as well-disguised as Pointsman surely would have wanted. Despite protestations by Tyrone's British friend, Tantivy, that his suspicions are merely more "Slothropian paranoia," Slothrop cannot dismiss a conveniently placed crab (a device which distracts the octopus but also saves it from the threat of the more dangerous, wine bottle-wielding American), as well as the bizarre nature of the attack itself. He objects, "Paranioa's ass. Something's up, a-and you know it!" (192). Slothrop's hitherto "paranoid" concerns crystallize into a certainty that his actions are scripted by some "Them," who have more knowledge of his past, and apparently more bearing on his future, than does Tyrone himself.

The progression from suspicion to surety marks the consistent tension between his inherited propensity to believe in a larger order than the

meaninglessness of a purely random material world and the sense that any such perceived order is solipsistic projection.[7] While Slothrop is still in England, investigating rocket impact sites, the narrator explains: "He hangs at the bottom of his blood's avalanche, 300 years of western swamp-Yankees, and can't manage but some nervous truce with their Providence. A *détente*. Ruins he goes on daily to look in are each a sermon on vanity. That he finds, as weeks wear on, no least fragment of any rocket, preaches how indivisible is the act of death . . . Slothrop's Progress: London the secular city instructs him: turn any corner and he finds himself in a parable" (25). In explicitly referencing John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the narrative strongly emphasizes the American lieutenant's descent from English colonists of the New World and its powerful influence on his view of the world. (Weissmann serves to connect Old England to Old Europe, and so on.) Like the New English God who last revealed himself to Christ's apostles, and therefore never to any of New England's saints, Slothrop has never seen any of the rockets whose sites of impact he must investigate: yet he possesses irrefutable knowledge of their existence.

Slothrop becomes also at least partly aware that the pattern of rocket strikes mirrors his movements through London. Not quite ready to accept God as the ultimate arbiter of Providence, he has some begrudging belief that someone, somewhere has a plan for him: "he has become obsessed with the idea of a rocket with his name written on it—if they're really set on getting him ("They" embracing possibilities far beyond Nazi Germany) that's the surest way, doesn't cost a thing to paint his name *on every one, right*?" (25). Slothrop lives in terror of this plan and has "conviction" that his fate is disastrous, demonstrating that Slothrop's secular present is not yet freed of an inherited New English hermeneutic of events in the world.

Slothrop tries to explain the complexity of his "Puritan" heritage to Tantivy, his sole friend and confidant; but the British intelligence officer cannot comprehend the burden of Tyrone's genealogical predisposition, what the narrative later describes as "a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia" (188). His English compatriot goes so far as to admit that he sees value in pretending to such an understanding of the world as a practical fiction to keep his physical reflexes keen. But Slothrop replies, "Who's pretending?" (25).

Though Tyrone does not explain his fears explicitly to his office mate, the narrator details it for the reader: "It's nothing he can see or lay hands on—sudden gases, a violence upon the air and no trace afterward . . . a Word, spoken

with no warning into your ear, and then silence forever. Beyond its invisibility, beyond hammerfall and doomcrack, here is its real horror, mocking, promising him death with German and precise confidence, laughing down all of Tantivy's quiet decencies . . . no, no bullet with fins, Ace . . . not the Word, the one Word that rips apart the day" (25). In his terror, Slothrop moves toward equating the rocket with God. The rocket comes to take on more significance than warfare's horrifying randomness: it is the Word; the Word of the Gospel of John, chapter 1; the Word in Genesis that creates the world by dividing the void; that "rips apart the day" when creating night, just as this Word sundered the heavens from the earth by separating the waters above from the waters below.[8]

This all-consuming terror of the power of something greater than one's self resembles the second stage in the conventional New English conversion experience. Though no one can say for sure when, at some point in the history of early New England's Congregationalism many of the colonies' churches began to demand a narrative of the saint's assurance that God had bestowed his grace freely on the petitioner's soul as a prerequisite for full membership.[9] According to Edmund Morgan, "the outlines of the pattern are plain: knowledge, conviction, faith, combat, and true, imperfect assurance" (Morgan, *Visible Saints* 72). For the sake of clarity, I will here paint the steps with rather broad strokes: first, the saint comes to the knowledge of God's greatness and the "power of the word" (*Visible Saints* 71) while accepting God's preordained plan for the world; next, he suffers with the conviction that he is hopeless to remedy the situation on his own; then he feels a desire and hope for God's salvation, manifested in the faith that God has chosen him for regeneration in the afterlife; finally, he must remain skeptical of his own knowledge of God's salvation, producing an internal conflict commensurate with his external conflict with the devil and his agents.

Slothrop clearly exhibits knowledge of the faith of his ancestors and familiarity with their belief in the "power of the word." Accepting that there may well be some preordained plot for the world, Slothrop develops a sincere conviction that he is helpless to do anything about his situation, although precisely to what this proper fear is directed—Them—remains uncertain.

Thus, Tyrone lives out the conventional beginning stages of the conversion experience; and while the conversion that Tyrone undergoes displays significant parallels to the "morphology of conversion" sketched out by Morgan, it deviates in substantial and telling ways. Through these deviations, Pynchon's novel creates an alternative "Puritan" worldview: a worldview that, as

in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, views history providentially but without God; one that ultimately allows Slothrop to recompose the conventional narrative of American Puritanism by eschewing the conservative strains most familiar in American history, which led to fear, despair, and intolerance, in favor of more liberal approaches to Christian belief and practice (deemed heretical by the conservative factions of New England) that encouraged acceptance, inclusion, and expanded tolerance.

From the stages of knowledge and fear, conversion generally progresses into faith and combat, which is to say that the convert develops full faith in God, but suffers from a conflict marked by desire and hope for God's saving grace and the concern that it may not come. This phase of Tyrone's own peculiar conversion comes shortly after he rescues Katje from the trained Octopus Grigori. The "Puritan reflex" called paranoia depended upon tenets that "there were, according to Augustine, two churches. One was pure but invisible; it included every person living, dead, or yet to be born, whom God had predestined for salvation. The other was visible but not entirely pure; it included only living persons who professed to believe in Christianity" (Morgan, *Visible Saints* 3). By extension, the New English Christian's universe was composed of two worlds. First, in order and priority, was the invisible world of God, his invisible church, and the devil who opposed that world. Second was the visible world, the material, which was a medium for that interaction. Perry Miller also insists that for New England's Congregationalists: "The visible world was not the final or the true world; it was a creation of God and it was sustained by Him from moment to moment. Deeper than belief in the more obvious articles of their creed lay the sense of the world as a created fabric, held together by a continuous emanation of divine power" (*New England Mind* 14). He continues, "'All creatures are dead Cyphers, of no signification, except the influence of God adds a figure to them.' . . . God not only gives being to the world, but, Himself the supreme intelligence, directs it to intelligible ends" 14–15). Like his "Puritan" progenitors, Tyrone begins to perceive an alignment between things as they seem to be and things as they "really are" (in an idealist sense): "for a minute here, Slothrop, in his English uniform, is alone with the paraphernalia of an order whose presence among the ordinary debris of waking he has only lately begun to suspect. [. . .] Meaning things to Them it never meant to us. Never. Two orders of being, looking identical . . . but, but . . ." (Pynchon, *GR* 202). In the landscape of *Slothrop's Progress*, this identification of "orders of being" moves him forward through the steps of conversion.

At the moment when so many of the plotlines in *Gravity's Rainbow* converge—namely, Octopus Grigori's "attack" on Katje and Slothrop's ostensibly heroic defense—someone steals every institutional marker of Tyrone's identity. All the material trappings that can identify him as American disappear: identification, uniform, characteristic Hawaiian shirts. Moving backward to the time when the colonists on American soil were still English, the narrator describes, "Ghosts of fishermen, glassworkers, fur traders, renegade preachers, hilltop patriarchs and valley politicians go avalanching back from Slothrop here, back to 1630 when Governor Winthrop came over to America on the *Arbella*, flagship of a great Puritan flotilla that year, on which the first American Slothrop had been a mess cook or something—there go that *Arbella* and its whole fleet, sailing backward in formation, the wind sucking them east again" (203–4). Dressed in an English uniform, "presto change-o! Tyrone Slothrop's English again! But it doesn't seem to be redemption exactly that *this* They have in mind" (204). Going forward, the language and concepts of colonial Congregationalism flood the following page: "the text of the day, where footnotes will explain it all" (204), which alludes to the New English tendency to read the world as an expression of God; "strangers" (205), another common term describing the preterit; "invisible" (205); "soul" (205); and, of course, "grace" (205).

Tyrone's conversion experience does not quite conform to the morphology Morgan articulates. For one thing, Slothrop's experience implies the same kind of reversal as does Spectro's imagined undoing of weapons manufacturing. Nor does he so much accept the power of God as give himself over to an idea of Providence, a force manifested by a Them that he never identifies or defines. Secondly (like Weissmann), he imagines himself first as preterit—something no Christian would ever do. Indeed, why would one subscribe to a religion that figures one's self as damned: what could be more hopeless? But, contrary to many critics' thinking, he does not believe himself overlooked for long. Most important, Pynchon's novel takes greatest issue with the problematic doctrine of pure, imperfect assurance. For that, one needs to look further back into Slothrop's family history, and into the history of America as a whole.

SLOTHROP'S GARDEN OF LOVE

The novel's narrator cites Thomas Hooker to invoke the problem of imperfect assurance. Quoted twice in the novel, Hooker's sermon "Spirituall Love and Joy" explains the sources and experience of true love for, and joy in, God. Since *Gravity's Rainbow* cites Hooker, and Hooker alone, one might read this move

as Thomas Pynchon playing one of his typically arcane jokes: presenting a criticism of Hooker's theology more than three hundred years after its publication as a resumption of the family feud that had Springfield removed from Hooker's control in Connecticut and placed under John Winthrop's in Massachusetts.

March 1638 brought a major corn shortage in the colonies, and Connecticut's then-Governor Hooker assigned William Pynchon the task of purchasing corn from the indigenous peoples close by. Pynchon found them reluctant to sell and passed along to Hooker a very high price: despite the clear opportunity for profit presented to the Native Americans, Hooker accused *Pynchon* of gouging and fined him a significant quantity of corn. So Pynchon took his city (Springfield, formerly Agawam) away from Hooker, and attached it instead to Winthrop's Massachusetts. It remains part of that state to this day.

There is more at work here than trampling on the graves of old family enemies. *Gravity's Rainbow* sees a danger in Hooker's Christianity, particularly as outlined in "Spirituall Love and Joy," and draws on the Slothrop family experience to articulate it. In so doing, Slothrop moves far beyond the stark and reductive simplicity of conservative Congregationalism into a new way of embracing the world's complexity, rather than reducing it to stark opposites. An oft-cited (within Pynchon scholarship) passage of "Spirituall Love" appears very early on: "'I know there is wilde love and joy enough in the world,' preached Thomas Hooker, 'as there are wilde Thyme, and other herbes; but we would have garden love, and garden joy, of Gods owne planting.' How Slothrop's garden grows" (22). To develop true Christian love, Hooker outlines a process whereby the chosen can ready their souls for God's divine seed. First he cites the doctrine: "the Spirit of the Father kindles in the soule of the sinner, truly humbled and inlightened, love and joy, to entertaine and rejoyce in the riches of his mercy, so as becomes the worth of it" (Hooker 180). He interprets this doctrine by asserting that the single most important prerequisite for accepting the love that Jesus may bring is a humbled heart.

Such a heart would suffer a nearly debilitating despair for having sinned against God. In this state of suffering, one can realize that there must be a better state of being, and the humbled heart will yield hope and desire. The torture of having realized one's wrongs, and thus one's unworthiness, naturally leads to the hope for a pardon from God. Such a reprieve cannot be earned, as that would be the effort of works, and not of a grace freely given by God. When one hopes that something so great as God's grace is available to the poor sinner's heart, one desires that grace: if and when it comes, the Christian is fully able to

recognize it and accept it for what it is. Having desired grace, and knowing the tortures of living without it, Hooker continues, grants insight into a soul. Thus, if and when God comes to this soul, it is able to identify his saving Grace and responds with "spirituall love" characterized by pure "joy," a joy that is commensurate with the greatness and goodness of God.

Behind the prospect of a loving and joyful soul lurks the genuinely terrifying paradox of assurance. In order to be a member of a New English Congregational church, one needed be assured of one's own standing in God's good graces. Asserting total assurance would claim absolute knowledge of God's divine workings, however, which is blasphemy, and a sure sign of a sinner. So when Hooker enumerates the four purposes in the application of his doctrine, serious problems emerge. He claims that spiritual love and joy offer "Instruction," "Consolation," "Reprehension," and "Exhortation" (Hooker 206). Thus, instruction teaches that nothing in the world can bring love to humankind in the same way that God does; nor can we love anything in the world as we do God. This goes back to the predominance of Neoplatonic idealism in Hooker's training and the belief that the world is comprised of just shadows of the reality that is God. Not surprisingly, this can be a painful lesson. Hooker writes: "It is an unconceivable misery, that any man should be so farre deluded, as to think that he can [attain the highest Love] by his own strength and power" (207); that is to say, one cannot love in the fullest spiritual sense without the help of God. He adds later: "I presse this instruction . . . to shew the disorderly proceedings of many poore Saints, that labour extremely to work their own soules, and to bring their hearts to love Christ; that they even fall out with themselves, and curse their base hearts, that can love the world, and cannot love Jesus Christ: they labour much, and would bring their hearts to love him, but they cannot doe it, because they goe to worke the contrary way" (211). To restate: a saint may think he loves God the right way, but thinking it does not necessarily mean he does love God correctly or that these feelings are a reliable sign of his salvation. Throw in a passionate, assured saint's slight but necessary doubt of his own assurance, and even the most pious will fear damnation to an eternity of hell—indeed, John Winthrop, that saintliest of governors, who founded Boston and led the ascension of Puritan New England, went to his grave terrified that he was wrong, that he would suffer his eternal afterlife separated from his God and in the anguish of hellfire.

The paradoxes of Hooker's theory of love and joy proliferate. When he writes that genuine love serves the end of consolation, he reminds the saint that

"there is a great deale of false love and false joy in the world" and that every man "must put his love on triall" (217). Yet the test requires that one identify genuinely inspired love for God—and again total assurance that this "love come[s] from the Spirit of the Father," and not "leane, earthly, and naturall love, that growes onely out of [one's] parts and abilities" (218).[10] If confusing fear follows from instruction and consolation, one can easily imagine the terrors that follow from "Reprehension" and "Exhortation." Simply put, in Hooker's system, where absolute fervency in faith leads, a deep and terrible depression rightly follows. Or one might think of it this way: behind every good, saint's joy, there is an even more powerfully crippling despair. Hooker's treatise on love and joy is full of the deepest sorrows. Since these sorrows offer the believer partial assurance of election, they are a good thing, Hooker leads us to believe.

SALVIFIC SLOTH

As the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* posits, Slothrop's garden of love grows, but his sexual exploits make clear that it does not abound with the "Spirituall Love" Hooker advocates. Steven Weisenburger correctly indicates that Pynchon's diction "ironizes Hooker's sermon" (*Companion* 26), in that it "teems with virgin's-bower, with forget-me-nots, with rue and all over the place, purple and yellow as hickeys, a prevalence of *love-in-idleness*" (*GR* 22, emphasis added). Ever the trickster, Pynchon seeds this garden with particular plants, clarifying an important point raised by his second explicit reference to Hooker's sermon. Calling that final flower "love-in-idleness," rather than the more common name "pansy," suggests a favorite Pynchon theme: sloth.

Hooker talks about three ranks of men that work against the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth: open enemies; hypocrites; and the Slothrop variety, "the glozing neuters." The first two types are self-evident: the final category, however, is more complex. Of this middle sort, Hooker writes: "these also love their sins more than Christ, nay, they love him not at all in truth; these are they that halt between two opinions, your fair fools, that would harm no man; so no man would harm them: the highest pitch these come to, is this, that they may get respect and credit among the best, and they say, He that meddles least is happiest: these are pretty good civil neighbors, and will sometimes do a man a good turn, provided they may not hurt themselves; . . . if a wretched man come, they will be like him, and now and then strew forth faith and troth: they will not reprove others, because they shall not censure them" (243).[11] For Hooker, these people lack the courage of their convictions, and oscillate in a state of

ambivalence. They adapt to contexts, rather than projecting a rigid dogmatism into every situation.

In Hooker's view, this "glozing neuter" threatens the establishment of God's earthly kingdom as powerfully as an open and avowed enemy to the congregation. Pynchon, in contrast, expounds the difficulties of living in this state: "Those whom the old Puritan sermons denounced as 'the glozing neuters of the world' have no easy road to haul down, Wear-the-Pantsers, just cause you can't see it doesn't mean it's not there! Energy inside is just as real, just as binding and inescapable, as energy that shows. When's the last time you felt *intensely lukewarm*? eh? Glozing neuters are just as human as heroes and villains. In many ways they have the most grief to put up with, don't they?" (*GR* 677). Neither hero nor villain, saint nor stranger, Pynchon's glozing neuter is neither elect nor preterite (in contrast to Weissmann, whom we have seen is both). Though Hooker sees these people as enemies of Christ, William Slothrop's heresy identifies the ambivalent as a possible antidote to the intolerance of the fiercely dogmatic.

As is often the case in Pynchon's fictions, a single term's range of signification weighs heavily in understanding the numerous possibilities that his language makes available. Hooker leaves little doubt as to which definition of glozing he prefers, indicting those that tend "to talk smoothly and speciously; to use fair words or flattering language; to fawn" ("gloze" n.p.). *Gravity's Rainbow* is less explicit: by commenting on an "energy inside," Pynchon allows an understanding of "glozing" that means as much "to interpret" as it does "to extenuate." Slothrop and his ilk are branded guilty for thinking through a situation as much as they are damned by Hooker for failing to come to a decision. But the novel is not done playing with the dictionary here. In fact, the very name "Tyrone Slothrop" helps to inform the potential positive quality of glozing neutrality.

For one, sloth is a cardinal sin of particular interest to Pynchon and makes up the first half of the surname. In his essay on this seemingly mild mortal sin, "Nearer, my couch, to Thee," Pynchon examines the putative secularization of sloth throughout the development of capitalist America. He argues that initially, "'Acedia' in Latin means sorrow, deliberately self-directed, turned away from God, a lack of spiritual determination that then feeds back on in to the process, soon enough producing what are currently known as guilt and depression, eventually pushing us to where we will do anything, in the way of venial sin and bad judgment, to avoid the discomfort" ("Nearer" 3). Crucially, Pynchon

emphasizes that sloth is not a sin of laziness or slowness, per se, as most popular accounts hold. Instead, it manifests the failure of a particular kind of activity—the inaugural failure to actively love and have faith in God results in the kinds of sins one commits in order to fill that void. Thus, sloth serves as a gateway sin, so to speak, leading to more numerous and different but lesser sins.

The kinds of sin that perturb Pynchon in the Sloth essay are not those handed down at Sinai or enumerated in Leviticus: those biblically based sins violate a rigid order of carefully defined mandates and prohibitions. The kind of sinning represented in Exodus and Leviticus has become a rote morality; in *Gravity's Rainbow* the modern sin of sloth that rankles the narrator is, as lamented by the narrator in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, moral malaise in the face of injustice and iniquity.

For an example of this kind of sinner, see the rocket engineer of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Franz Pökler. His sin takes the form of his inability to stand up for his ethical beliefs: that his wife Leni should be freed from the SS camps; that he should be allowed to keep a life with his daughter, Ilse; that the rocket should feature in efforts to prevent and not execute war; and so forth. He believes too deeply, though, that the system will work itself out. Six times he is given papers for indefinite leave as well as the company of a girl that he believes could be his daughter, without apparent surveillance. He does not flee. Franz instead always waits for Them to once again abduct his daughter and then returns to the rocket plant at Peenemünde. In his hope for the humanist element of the corporate state to hold sway over its clearly exploitative elements, he glozes (as in staring intently) too much upon the stars to gloze (as in think through, interpret) his true feelings about Leni, his daughter, Weissmann, the Wehrmacht, or the war. Pökler exemplifies the danger of Hooker's way of thinking. Believing too strongly without deviating from the predominant moral order, he sinks into despondency because of the fatal mixture of belief and doubt. Against the evils in Camp Dora, next to his rocket manufactuing site, he does nothing.

Contrary to the position advanced in *Gravity's Rainbow*, modern America defines sloth as a sin against economy, against productivity. Citing Bartleby and the *exemplar fide* of acedia, the couch potato, today's lazy bones commits sins against linear time: what in *Gravity's Rainbow* might be called "secular history" (170). In squandering the finite number of hours and seconds that could be marshaled in the service of profit, the modern sloth enthusiast is the anti-Poor Richard, the opposite of the young Jay Gatz, dreamily eyeing the splendor of a yacht from shore while relegating the day's every moment to a paragon of

productivity. "In the idea of time that had begun to rule city life in Poor Richard's day, where every second was of equal length and irrevocable, not much in the course of its flow could have been called nonlinear, unless you counted the ungovernable warp of dreams, for which Poor Richard had scant use . . . there would seem to have been no other room for speculations, dreams, fantasies, fiction. Life in that orthogonal machine was supposed to be nonfiction" ("Nearer" 3). Pynchon finds hope in this kind of acedia. For, after all, this is the sin of dreaming, of fantasizing—it is thus also the sin of writing. Dreaming, aided by alternative notions of temporality, may posit a solution to the triumph of linear time, and the death of imagination.

Videotape and channel surfing add to the possibilities given by oneiric time as alternatives to predominating notions of temporality. "Video time can be reshaped at will. What may have seemed under the old dispensation like time wasted and unrecoverable is now perhaps not quite as simply structured. If Sloth can be defined as the pretense, in the tradition of American settlement and spoliation, that time is one more nonfinite resource, there to be exploited forever, then we may for now at least have found the illusion, the effect, of controlling, reversing, slowing, speeding and repeating time—even imagining that we can escape it. Sins against video time will have to be radically redefined" ("Nearer" 3). As Steven Weisenburger recognized even before the publication of "Nearer," *Gravity's Rainbow* neither endorses the linear time of "Puritan" teleology nor the predictably cyclic time of Enzian's "Zone Herero" faction. As he concludes, "History, we find, does not march inexorably forward by goosesteps, nor does it gyrate in circles" ("End" 70). If history and time are not limited to a linear/cyclical binary, as both Pynchon and his best-informed critics assert, it is reasonable to question other predominant binaries that the novel treats, perhaps most significantly, an Elect/Preterit binary that too often stands unquestioned in the criticism.

Slothrop's family history suggests Tyrone in part inherits his condition: they are not powerful, nor are they poor, for despite all their production, "they did not prosper . . . about all they did was persist" (*GR* 28). In short, they are neither elect, nor are they preterit, despite Tyrone's early musings. They are some other, middling term that upsets the American binary image of success or failure, of good or evil, of saint or stranger. His search for his history—more, I argue, than the search for the rocket—gives him fuller insight into the nature of a salvific sloth, one that makes up a key term that breaks apart the Elect/Preterit binary and affords him a way of living outside the formulation

of death-in-life that marks the postwar period but that has its roots in William Pynchon's theological writings.

WILLIAM AND WILLIAM

If Thomas Hooker illustrates the despair inherent in New English thinking, William Pynchon's writings reflect a more hopeful strain possible within Congregationalism that the conservative branch chose to excise from the American politico-religious landscape. As Robert Daly explains: "Justification was election: it was being chosen by God before all time. Redemption from sin was usually construed to follow from the conversion experience. . . . After this conversion experience, Puritans believed, poor sinners would still sin, but they would now wish to avoid sins and do good deeds, a shift in habitual tendencies that the Puritans called sanctification" ("Burned" 206). New England's Christians largely believed that their election by God for the invisible church made them better people in the visible world. This ties in neatly with their belief that the "covenant of grace" between God and man was made with the whole community, and not with discrete persons. Naturally, the rhetoric of their time comes to make a whole new kind of sense. It is no accident that the binary of elect and preterite is also figured as "saints" and "strangers." For at that time, "stranger" meant also "alien" or "foreigner": the newly emerging America was, as now, full of a kind of illegal aliens—that is, people who lived in the land but not the covenant; inhabitants lacking proper fear, and thus "foreign" to the community of saints.

Daly explains that William Pynchon finds a danger in valuing only the opinions and ideas of those who have undergone a recognizable conversion experience as testaments to election. He rephrases the antique Pynchon for a more modern reader: "If we are redeemed from sin at the moment of our justification, and if that redemption is not and cannot be distinct from our justification, then it is possible that many among us who have not yet had the conversion experience are not only justified but also already redeemed from sin, and we may wish to consider their opinions something other than sinful delusions" (209). In short, even though those around us may not be marked by the same experiences and therefore share a common identity, these people might still be loved by God, forgiven from sin, and worth very much the same as ourselves.

William's descendent Thomas takes some license with William's theology, but his innovations demonstrate familiarity with the history. The narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* describes a William Slothrop who, as a pig farmer, "took off

from Boston, heading west in true Imperial style, in 1634 or -5, sick and tired of the Winthrop machine, convinced he could preach as well as anybody in the hierarchy even if he hadn't been officially ordained" (*GR* 554–55). Though pigs were scorned throughout folklore and the Bible, Slothrop, in good dissenting fashion and like Tyrone three centuries later, saw his work with the animals "as a parable" and that he "must've been waiting for the pig who wouldn't die" (555). William "wrote a long tract about it presently, called *On Preterition*. It had to be published in England, and is among the first books to've been not only banned but also ceremonially burned in Boston. Nobody wanted to hear about all the Preterite, the many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation. William argued holiness for these 'second Sheep,' without whom there'd be no elect. You can bet the elect in Boston were pissed off about that. And it got worse. William felt that what Jesus was for the elect, Judas Iscariot was for the Preterite. Everything in the Creation has its equal and opposite counterpart. How can Jesus be an exception? could we feel for him anything but horror in the face of the unnatural, the extracreational? Well, if he is the son of man, and if what we feel is not horror but love, then we have to love Judas too. Right?" (555–56). William Slothrop's theology is really only one small step to the left from William Pynchon's progressive thinking, from theorizing the potential value of the presumed unregenerate to asserting their outright necessity.

This need leads to the novel's greatest reconsideration of American history. "Could [William] have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from? Suppose the Slothropite heresy had had the time to consolidate and prosper? Might there have been fewer crimes in the name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot? It seems to Tyrone Slothrop that there might be a route back—maybe that anarchist he met in Zürich was right, maybe for a little while all the fences are down, one road as good as another, the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up…" (556). Reflecting on his personal past also allows Slothrop to reflect on his national past, and in so doing Tyrone contrives a subjunctive historiography: the way back is not reversing (as in Kevin Spectro and Billy Pilgrim's film run backward) but retelling; meanwhile, the uncertain ("maybe") takes precedence over positive assertions. If the novel can retell New English Christianity not as an orthodoxy of exclusion, intolerance, and despair, à la Thomas Hooker, but instead as a system of beliefs that values alterity and difference as necessary

components of attaining true selfhood, *perhaps* America could reconstruct itself as an entity that does not privilege a false sense of exceptionalism that leads to the violence and destruction of Manifest Destiny. *Perhaps* as a nation it can create its identity, time and again, not against "others" but by embracing as many possibilities of being American as there are Americans.

Identifying the suppression of William Slothrop's *On Preterition* as the diverging point wherein New English thinking—and by extension the American national identity—resolves itself to exclusion marks Tyrone's full abandonment of settled Puritanism as a viable episteme for understanding himself and his present. When it held out the possibility for accepting difference, he was unsure whether he was elect or preterit. From there on, the binary does not hold. Seen as complementary, rather than contradictory, the narrative of *Slothrop's Progress* moves beyond the "Puritan" to a new stage of self-fashioning, characterized by a pattern of conversions from one identity to the next. His time at the Casino Hermann Goering is the clearest moment of his Puritan conversion, a period of his life that also coincides with his becoming English. This change is followed by his conversions to the Rocketman persona, to a Russian soldier, and to Max Schlepzig. Not long after his epiphany that American history followed the wrong narrative track, Slothrop converts to the Plechazunga, the North German "Pig-Hero" who, as Steven Weisenburger points out, "was not 'tamed,' that is, was not translated from the pagan into a Christian context" ("End" 245). His role as Rocketman gives over to his place among the swine, fulfilling what Katje and Säure knew was a part of his identity: both of these members of the Counterforce insist that Slothrop is, indeed, a pig.[12] In *Gravity's Rainbow*, pigs suggest potential—ore to be shaped or cattle to be herded—especially when one sees them absent the term's pejorative context.

THE "END" OF SLOTHROP

Tyrone's final conversion may be his most perplexing: part 4, which begins on the Feast of the Transfiguration, features Slothrop taking on characteristics of different "fools" as he becomes "scattered" across the Counterforce's field of operation.[13] Among the last few that "can still see Slothrop as any kind of integral creature anymore" (*GR* 740) is seaman Bodine, possibly "Pig" Bodine from Pynchon's first novel, *V.* Joseph W. Slade postulates that the scientist "[Laszlo] Jamf presumably has succeeded in making Tyrone Slothrop (a test model) immortal, and created the 'pig that wouldn't die' foretold by a Slothropian ancestor. The rocket that was supposed to be a star of the 'evening . . .

luminous enough to tell [man] he will never die' (p. 760) thus rises in mock annunciation. It is the Star in the West. The device, outrageous enough even for Pynchon, attests to his admittedly ambivalent faith in technology. Slothrop's coming is forgotten in the rush to rationalize the rocket" (69). Slade recognizes that the novel ends on an ambivalent note. There is a strong distinction, however, between ambivalence (or being pulled strongly in two directions) and ambiguity (uncertainty owing to competing interpretations): *Gravity's Rainbow* concludes on a drastically different note than does *Slaughterhouse-Five*. While surrendering the shared history he has with his Americanness, Slothrop loses his identity, an identity that was always overdetermined by his history. In closing his "temporal bandwith" to the smallest "[delta-]t" (*GR* 509), he puts off the bleakness of his New English past, and with it the determined future that follows from providential theories of history. Whereas Vonnegut's film runs backward to the prelapsarian Eden, Pynchon's film brings us back to the unprocessed pigs of ore, whose future as resources is yet to be determined.

What kind of existence does this look like? It may come into greater focus with attention to a facet of William Pynchon's theology that has been overlooked by contemporary scholarship. Refuting the doctrine of imputation—that is, the belief that God imputed the sins of mankind to Christ to exonerate us—Pynchon contended that "the kind of death that fell upon Adam for his disobedient eating, must be understood primarily as the spiritual death of his pure nature, in corrupt and sinful qualities" (*Meritorious Price* 6). This is the nature of the original sin, and also the fallout from the biblical insistence that "the Wages of Sin is Death." Calvinism maintains that we all suffer from spiritual death: earthly resurrection is effected through God's grace, the experience of being "born again." Calvinism holds that we are, in another commonly Pynchonian trope, living "death in life," unless numbered among the predestined regenerate.

Notice that Slothrop dithers: in his peculiar Puritan conversion, he identifies with the elect as often as he assumes his own preterition. After converting to Rocketman, Slothrop asks "Providence, hey Providence, what'd you do, step away for a beer or something?" Most critics seem to stop reading the passage here, holding Slothrop's uncertainty as evidence of his preterit state. But, crucially, the novel answers, "Not at all." Providence has *not* left his side, and, as Rocketman, he is at least partly elect. He is less and less determined by the binary of elect and preterit, as is evidenced by the recovery of the hashish he carries and the brief but significant brush with Mickey Rooney: "He is the

invisible youth, the armored changeling. Providence's little pal. *Their* preoccupation is with forms of danger the War has taught them—phantoms that may be doomed now, some of them, to carry for the rest of their lives. Fine for Slothrop, though—it's a set of threats he doesn't belong to. They are still back in geographical space, drawing deadlines and authorizing personnel, and the only beings who can violate their space are safely caught and paralyzed in comic books. They think. They don't know about Rocketman here. They keep passing him and he remains alone, blotted to evening by velvet and buckskin—if they do see him his image is shunted immediately out to the boondocks of the brain where it remains in exile with other critters of the night" (*GR* 379).[14] Slothrop, as Rocketman, becomes "providence's little pal," even if his pal "giv[es] him the finger" later on (461). In this case, providence enables him to be passed over, but the passing saves, not damns him. A saving preterition collapses the supposedly opposed states into each other. Note Mickey Rooney's reaction, that Slothrop "*knows* he is seeing Mickey Rooney, though Mickey Rooney, wherever he may go, will repress the fact that he ever saw Slothrop. It is an extraordinary moment" (382). Without the simple, monolithic terms of identity to rely on, Slothrop becomes something new—a spiritual being without corporeality. This is not the opposite of death-in-life, but rather a unique way of being in the world that makes him an especially effective part of the Counterforce. It counters not the institutions so much as the codification that gives one institution value over others.

If the repressive Puritan apparatus determines a subject position through its labeling, Slothrop denies the practice by rendering the terms inconsequential through equivocation. Preterite is elect, and elect is preterite, and neither now means anything. Slothrop leads his comrades into "revolting" at the high society dinner. As Christopher Ames argues, "in Pynchon's bifurcated world of Elect and Preterite, Force and Counterforce, Them and Us, the austere language of equations has a linguistic counterpart. 'For every kind of vampire,' Pynchon writes, 'there is a kind of cross.' Surprisingly, the linguistic counterpart of the equation is the obscenity. The obscene utterance—borne through gesture, shout, or graffito—becomes the purified language of the Preterite, the not completely powerless cry of the dispossessed" (Ames 191). Ames's analysis, astute as it is, ought not insist on perseverance of the preterite and thus simply reverse the Calvinist doctrine. By the novel's end, the world of bifurcations cannot account for Slothrop, and for that world he is invisible, making him part of Augustine's invisible world and, in a certain sense, among the elect. Yet the

novel does account for his existence, perhaps not as an "integral figure," but as a fraction somewhere below the one and beyond the zero. Rather than a fully determined subject, he is now a legend in the Zone, not limited to one identity that can be pinned down, but instead always converting to the needs of the time and place.

The final scene in the book offers a moment of return. Placing the novel's conclusion in Richard M. Zhlubb's Orpheus Theatre recalls the opening pages' claim that the dream of evacuation is "all theatre" (*GR* 3). Indeed, the novel opens with a dream of deliverance: an evacuation that is also salvation. It is not the elect who are saved, nor is it a redemption of the damned. They are instead "second sheep, all out of luck and time"; borne away from the screaming in the sky, but not outward from peril to safety: "no, this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive *knotting into*" (3). Salvation involves movement, change, and complication. Slothrop's sloth-driven salvation thus is not a transcendent journey, a far cry from the great Puritan poet Edward Taylor, whose saints found themselves "Encoacht for Heaven that sang for Joy. / For in Christs Coach they sweetly sing, / As they to Glory ride therein" (Taylor, "Joy of Church Fellowship" ll 3–6). Slothrop, "encoacht" toward the Zone in a train full of "second sheep," escapes by repeated, responsive conversions. *Gravity's Rainbow*, then, offers spiritual fulfillment less in "coming to Jesus" than constantly becoming to the world.

The implications of Slothrop's conversion and subsequent reformation suggest possibilities for American identity outside the conditions the "blood's avalanche" that his "swamp Yankee" ancestry might seemingly permit (or even require: see my analysis of Teddy Roosevelt's Puritan myth in chapter 1). In recovering the Slothropite heresy, *Gravity's Rainbow* links Weissmann's Eurocentric obsession with whiteness and Enzian's Zone-Herero blackness (both of which extremes anticipate a necessary oblivion) to a "fundamentally" American moment of historical determination. Slothrop's conversions connect the postwar condition with pre-national potential, suggesting a subjunctive outcome that was passed over yet nevertheless present at the site of America's mythical origins.

Both present and diffuse, invisible and efficacious, Slothrop seems to suggest the manner by which Americans might recast the past to a less teleological future. The liberal potential of the Puritan myth also animates Marilynne Robinson's fiction, a fact that further collapses putative distinctions in American

(literary) thought. For while critics rarely connect the two, owing to their radically differing aesthetics, their responses to New English religious history allies them in a surprisingly similar cause.

5

REREADING PURITAN SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN *GILEAD*

We ought not to rack our brains about God; but rather, we should contemplate him in his works.

—Calvin, I.v.9

Marilynne Robinson's 2004 novel, *Gilead*, takes the form of a letter from an ailing and aging John Ames to his young son. It focuses on the Calvinist preacher's best friend Robert Boughton and the scandalous births of two children to his estranged son, Jack (who is named for Ames). The birth of Jack's first child to a poor teenager on the edge of town rocks the foundation of the esteemed Boughton name; Jack's second child, about whom Robert does not know, shares the black Africanist ancestry of his mother. The novel becomes, at times, a melodrama; at others, it is a morality tale about the need to forgive, lest one should forget how crucial family is to a person's happiness.

Home, the first sequel to *Gilead*, details much the same story from the perspective of Boughton's daughter, Glory. She tells of Jack's return to Gilead, Iowa, after two decades' absence, ravaged by drink and a largely secret relationship with an African American woman from St. Louis; the novel never really makes clear what Jack wants of his dying father, because he himself does not know what to expect from his life. The Christian faith that promises Boughton the chance to redeem his son ultimately demonstrates Calvinism's potential to exclude and alienate not just individual persons, but entire classes of Americans. Taken together, the books offer a remarkable portrayal of America in 1957: of how the Civil Rights movement worked its way into even the "whitest" of American communities, as well as how national tensions exposed America's stratification. In the main, this chapter will discuss Robinson's rereading of American

Calvinism from a position outside the predominant Puritan narrative: *Gilead* transplants historically "Puritanical" modes of representation into its mid-twentieth-century context, challenging the popular sense that New English Calvinists detested the physical world. I will conclude that while Robinson's work can make New English Christianity serve alternate aims than those of exclusion and discrimination, her vision requires more than theorization, but also an unlikely implementation.

Gilead relates the Boughton narrative almost indirectly, frequently disrupting the development of the story's progress toward resolution with extended meditations on the beauty of the world. Ames's aesthetic attention to the world exhibited in these digressions offers readers an experience of the divine in the immediate and the immanent. In such instances, Ames stops short of knowing through reason and is content with simply living the experience of the miraculous in the everyday.

Ames represents remnants of the Puritans' errand into the wilderness, which Robinson sees as having "died early in [the twentieth] century" (Robinson, *Adam* 150). Taking Ames's convictions into consideration allows us to see how the moments of intense perception fit into a tradition of thinking and writing about the world that is steeped in this Puritan religious tradition. Contrary to what Laura E. Tanner asserts, his insights do not report "terrible" experiences brought on by the fear of death.[1] Instead, the sheer pleasure of the world is highly problematic in New English Christianity, a brand of Calvinism so deeply inflected with Neoplatonic idealism that it nearly denies outright the positive qualities of earthly beauty. Ames repudiates this transcendent idealism, preferring to leave considerations of the infinite for when he gets to the afterlife, and turns instead toward a sense of the miraculous in his aesthetic appreciation of the immediate natural world.

ROBINSON'S CONTEMPORARY CALVINISM

Not everyone is comfortable looking at Robinson's contemporary interpretation of Reformed theology as attributable to Calvin. Though Todd Shy praises Robinson's essays in *The Death of Adam* for holding onto the "thread" of "what has made us good[,] pulling it forward into new contexts" (Shy 256), he likes this metaphor primarily because "it hints at the dangers of unraveling," a condition to which Robinson's interpretation exposes Calvin's ideas (256). Shy questions whether Robinson's spirituality "is Calvinist at all" (253) and claims, "where Robinson steers her theology I doubt Calvin would be willing to follow" (254).

This is where Shy has missed the point. Robinson consciously reads the settled Puritan tradition against itself, especially those interpretations of New English Calvinism that too often have the effect of overamplifying the minor-key notes in their understandings of Calvin.[2] Robinson's approach thus treats Calvinism in a similar manner to how Mark C. Taylor approaches Lutheranism in *After God*, regarding religion not as a stable entity but a fluid and actively destabilizing one.[3] Taylor demonstrates why religion must be understood through both its diachronic and synchronic variations; he also describes the manner in which systems of religious belief are subject to the feedback loops and modifications experienced by all systems (32).

For Taylor, then, systems of Christian belief are dynamic, not static. Robinson's novel, seen in the light of some of her earlier nonfiction writing, focuses on careful attention to the beauty of the world and calls forth a much-overlooked movement in America's Calvinist tradition. Considered within the context of New England Puritan writers Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Shepard, and Jonathan Edwards, *Gilead* provides a radical but legitimate rereading of the Calvinism that came after Puritanism: a rereading that finds the beauty of the world not simply as an a fortiori argument for the beauty of God's afterlife, but as an experience of the divine itself.[4] As in this chapter's epigraph, Robinson places the humanist Calvin before the theological one; in so doing, she adds to the ever growing quilt that is America's Calvinist tradition and stitches her own interpretation of Calvin's writings on to those of a group to which she belongs, not from which she is distinct.

Robinson's posture toward Puritanism is unmistakable in her nonfiction writing.[5] Critiquing America's collective ignorance about the first English settlers in the northern New World, she notes that "history does not precisely authorize the use we make of the word 'Puritanism'" (*Adam* 152); she reminds us that their writings "are by no means characterized by, for example, fear or hatred of the body, anxiety about sex, or denigration of women . . . yet for some reason Puritanism is uniquely regarded as synonymous with these preoccupations" (151). Doubtless, many historians and literary critics alike would bristle at efforts to downplay the stern moralism, intolerance, and exclusivity inherent in America's Calvinist past. But the speed with which such objections are likely to leap to mind simply serves to illustrate Robinson's larger point. "If one says the Puritans were a more impressive and ingratiating culture than they are assumed to have been," she indicates, "one will be heard to say that one finds repressiveness and intolerance ingratiating" (153). Robinson chastises America

at large for failing to acknowledge, engage with, and understand some of its earliest and most influential European forebears in and on their own terms. What little most people know of them, as well as of their most prominent theological influence, John Calvin, comes to us second- and thirdhand. "Learned-looking books on subjects to which [Calvin] is entirely germane," Robinson rightly complains, "typically do not include a single work of his immense corpus in their bibliographies, nor indicate in their allusions to him a better knowledge than folklore can provide of what he thought and said" (*Adam* 12). She points to the many instances where popularly held ideas about Calvin are invoked rather than his actual writings are cited, which leads to further mischaracterizations and misprisions, thus further distancing common perceptions from informed interpretations of his thought.

Rejecting this apparently willful blindness to the true richness and subtlety of Calvinist thought, writing, and general attitudes toward the world, Robinson encourages readers to form a deeper intellectual relationship with a crucially important aspect of American history. In light of *The Death of Adam*'s obvious concern with America's inherited Puritan legacy, it is fitting that the ghosts of America's earliest Calvinists haunt the pages of her fiction. But before turning to the text's explicit engagement with the theology of Jonathan Edwards, it is also important to recognize the manner in which *Gilead* returns to a popular form of New English writing to situate her consideration of Calvinism in its larger context.

GILEAD AS SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Putatively writing in 1956 (and thus just after the period in which Puritanism died, according to Robinson), *Gilead*'s narrator uses the epistolary form to reconsider some of his most complicated personal difficulties with this world and the next. This is precisely the mode of spiritual autobiography: a genre quite common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Though its roots run much further back, the Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic found particular value in the form.[6] According to Owen C. Watkins, it differed from the practice and purpose of early New English biography inasmuch as its authors did not hold up their own lives as *exemplar fide* (in the familiar manner of Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*), but as exemplary in a more quotidian, everyman sense.[7] If this practice of biography foregrounded magnanimity, it did so as a model to emulate. On the other hand, spiritual autobiography brought most subjects down a considerable peg. "God was consistent in his

dealings with men throughout history," these texts evinced, "but since he called everyone individually, each saw some aspect of His glory that that was hidden from others" (Watkins 2). Moreover, by modeling self-discovery and religious practice, these narratives served an obvious didactic role in a culture that placed such a high value on the conversion experience.

In crafting Ames's autobiographical reflection on his religious experience, Robinson chooses an added detail that makes her take on spiritual autobiography somewhat rarefied—it is couched in the form of a journal/letter written by a Calvinist minister to his very young son. This choice is not unique, since at least three very prominent colonial New Englanders also composed their spiritual autobiographies as letters written to their children. Thomas Shepard's *Autobiography* and Anne Bradstreet's "To My Dear Children" provide us with the two earliest examples, while Cotton Mather's *Paterna* comes later. These works' shared characteristics with *Gilead* make comparison intriguing, and Robinson's generosity of spirit regarding the group she calls Puritans makes them warrantable. In content and concern, *Gilead* most resembles Bradstreet's "To My Dear Children" and Shepard's *Autobiography*, both also written by parents to children as a vehicle for contemplating their imminent demise and transmitting spiritual belief.[8] But whereas Bradstreet and Shepard turn their children toward the world as spiritual instruction regarding the transcendent, Ames points his son to the earthly as the site of God made manifest. Robinson, then, injects the old form with a new purpose.

Shepard primarily documents his frequent spiritual setbacks, offered as evidence of his numerous falls from grace and God's hand in his restoration thereto. His missive of torment and flight, loss and lament, also evinces a broader tendency wherein colonial New English autobiographers outline their foibles and failings, purportedly to show the human side of the community's leaders and thus to underscore the power of Providence over the personal in the operations of conversion and salvation. Like Ames, Shepard dedicates his letter "to [his] dear son . . . not knowing that [he] shall live to tell" the details of his life directly to the younger man, all in order that "he may learn to know and love the most high God, the God of his father" (35). Shepard sets forth the purpose of his writing in some detail—a reminder to his son that he must "*lift up thy eyes to heaven* to God in everlasting praises of him and dependence upon him" (39, my emphasis)—before he returns to the relatively mundane details of birth date and place and parentage. Similarly, Ames writes more than eight pages before delineating the particulars of his own birth.

Shepard's narrative's tortured final lines, which describe in some detail his second wife's remarkable piety in the throes of a terrible death, end with the lament that "God hath visited and scourged me for my sins and sought to wean me from this world, but I have ever found it a difficult thing to profit *even but a little* by the sorest and sharpest afflictions" (Shepard 73, my emphasis). With respect to Shepard's frequent meditation on death, Michael Colacurcio notes how Shepard implies that "by God's design, beloved persons lose their lives to teach their ardent lover not to love too much" (*Godly Letters* 109); this theme is also echoed heavily in Bradstreet's poetry on the deaths of her grandchildren, as well as in Edward Taylor's poetry about the loss of his children.[9]

Shepard's complaints are not issued solely for the sake of personal expiation: the public effect of his spiritual autobiography was recognized in his time and immediately thereafter. David Brainerd, a missionary to Native Americans and almost son-in-law to Jonathan Edwards, "offered a portion of Shepard's diary to eighteenth-century readers as an antidote to enthusiastic delusions, citing the diarist's most prominent characteristics as his great 'Self-Emptiness, Self-Loathing . . . and deep unfeigned Self-Abasement'" (Shea 141, ellipsis in original). While such values may not seem consistent with the modern ethic of self-affirmation, love of self was far from an ideal of Calvinist existence—John Winthrop's "A Modell of Christian Charity," for instance, defined self-love (rather than self-sacrifice) as a sign of damnation, not election. Colacurcio applies this thinking specifically to Thomas Shepard's narrative. "This peculiar strategy—ac-cen-tuate the negative—proves successful enough to suggest that Shepard may be learning to 'beat Satan as it were with his own weapons'" (*Godly Letters* 136). Ultimately, then, "the work of compunction begins to discover that hatred of sin is identically hatred of self, [and] Shepard goes on to cultivate rather than repress that precise affect" (136). Self-effacement would then work to highlight both Christ and the community, making the de-emphasis of self-interest a significant public aim of the *Autobiography*.

Michael McGiffert points out that Shepard's narrative served to address the anxiety that plagued normative New English Christians. Constant doubt of one's salvation was essentially a prerequisite of Church membership. As Edmund S. Morgan puts it: "this was the constant message of the Puritan preachers: in order to be sure one must be unsure. . . . The surest earthly sign of a saint was his uncertainty; and the surest sign of his damned soul was his security" (*Visible Saints* 70). Rather than ignore such a fundamental uncertainty and run the risk of allowing this self-doubt to consume an individual's life, Shepard marshals

self-doubt itself, almost impossibly, as evidence of salvation (McGiffert 19). If this seems paradoxical to the modern sensibility, it apparently did not to the New English, as is made plain in Bradstreet's autobiographical sketch.

Bradstreet composes her much shorter letter—like Ames's, to be read posthumously—to children who "may gain some spiritual advantage by my experience" (240). In a move characteristic of the genre, Bradstreet is careful "not to set forth myself" as an example of right living, for to do so would be proud; instead, she works to witness "the Glory of God" (240). These efforts mirror Ames's own self-deprecation, highlighting as he does "the full measure of my own incomprehension" (Robinson, *Gilead* 20), and cautioning that he is "not by any means a saint" (39). While Ames trumpets surprising moments of joy, however, affliction and loss stand out as Bradstreet's most salient concerns. As with Shepard, the attention she pays to the strife of living is not intended to register as lament as much as opportunity—one may, she hints, be responsible for benefiting from such trials. Bradstreet would recover earthly discomfort as instruction, Daniel B. Shea posits. "For her own children, Anne Bradstreet set forth a lesson regarding affliction that required greater docility and a keener sense of paradox. A later, festering Puritanism would say: read joy as evil. This Puritan directs her children to read pain, the world's evil, as joy" (114). For Bradstreet, psychological and physical pain leads to an enhanced knowledge of God, and the subsequent knowledge comprises life's best joy. Thus she reinscribes physical illness as a spiritual remedy, years of childlessness as a reminder of her own place as God's child, and suffering as solace. "I have had abundance of sweetness . . . after affliction," she insists, almost as though the former were a consequence of the latter (Bradstreet 242).

These efforts to reinterpret physical suffering as spiritual instruction highlight a consistent, self-conscious program in Bradstreet's work to see the world solely as a material expression of God's transcendent being. While one might cite any of a number of examples, her poem "Some Verses Upon the Burning of Our House, July 10th, 1666" perhaps best spells out the negative tendency in the settled Puritans' Calvinism that Robinson's novel seeks to redress. Like all her peers, Bradstreet clearly longs for some degree of assurance in her election; the riches she truly desires reside in heaven, not on Earth. Spiritual treasure is her greatest store, and Bradstreet's speaker—as all good New English Christians were wont to do—attempts to reconfigure the destruction of her home as an opportunity to fill her coffers with even more empyrean wealth:

> And when I could no longer look [at the house],

I blest his Name that gave and took,
That laid my goods now in the dust.
Yea so it was, and so 'twas just.
It was His own, it was not mine;
Far be it that I should repine[.] (17–22)

The poem's opening accepts God's will with little complication. Remarkably, though, the speaker takes little consolation in knowing that the house forthcoming in the afterlife vastly exceeds in value the one she has just lost on this Earth. The promise of "better, later" fails to assuage the pangs she feels due to her love of the material. The object lesson, the opportunity to meditate on God's graces in contradistinction to the essential worthlessness of worldly things, does not lift her spirits for long.

Though the fire reminds her of the brilliant life to follow after her shadowy existence in this world, the poem continues with a predominant sense of loss, not profit, as she records her subsequent walks past the pile of her former residence. The speaker's thoughts persist in an account ledger's red, detailing what is not to come as a result of what she has lost.

Under thy roof no guest shall sit,
Nor at thy Table eat a bit.
No pleasant tale shall e'er be told,
Nor things recounted done of old.
No candle e'er shall shine in thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be.
In silence ever shall thou lie;
Adieu, Adieu, all's vanity. (33–40)

This poem, and many others in Bradstreet's oeuvre, reveals a persona who struggles with dismissing the value of the world precisely because she finds so much beauty in it. And she takes perhaps too much joy in that beauty. Such is clearly the case in poems like "The Four Seasons" and "Contemplations," which make her admiration for what she sees as God's creation so vivid. While she manages also to make a place for her devotion evident, it is only after her passionate representations of the natural environment receive minute attention.

Composed as they are, Shepard's and Bradstreet's letters to their children are at once private and public; they are as much about the self as they are about the community. I must here reassert that embracing the suffering of the physical world is not required by Calvin's writings. Instead, this apparent virtue develops as a consequence of historically reiterated practice. And if the almost caricatured magnification of the suffering of human existence foregrounded in

early American spiritual autobiography contributes to the reified Puritanism plaguing the landscape of readers and scholars, then it makes all the more sense that Robinson would enter the discourse of this genre by trumpeting joy and appreciation as a way of recovering the better parts of America's most influential Calvinists.

Gilead, then, can be seen as extrapolating a trajectory inherent in the Calvinist tradition that is too often overlooked in the tendency to focus primarily on darker elements of settled Puritanism. Ames's attitude represents the reverse side of Bradstreet's needlework: her repeated attempts to embroider her sense of loss with the thread of God's instruction demonstrate her need to recast the world's beauty as a substrate for something greater than itself. Ames makes no effort toward the covering up. The more Bradstreet's poetry attempts to reinscribe the world in the terms of God, the more it is clear that she has yet to be fully divested from her love of such a world. But most importantly, the constant (and ultimately vain, in the case of Thomas Shepard) attempts at transmuting physical suffering into spiritual instruction make the New English colonists appear to have privileged misery over joy. It should come as no surprise that the figure of Puritans handed down through history to Robinson is so choked with black bile, and the Calvinism they preach so frequently mistaken for ascetic morbidity.

This bleaker form of Calvinism is embodied in *Gilead* by the first John Ames (grandfather to the narrator), a fiery abolitionist prone to giving away all of his family's material possessions. Robinson's characterization of the eldest John Ames criticizes New English militancy as well as its tendency to self-identify apophatically—that is, defining itself by enumerating all the things it is not. The elder John was an advocate of serious social reform and, if necessary, violent tactics to realize his aims. The one-eyed patriarch (who lost an eye fighting for the Union—or more accurately, *against* slavery) was sorely disappointed in his son, an ardent pacifist. In hyperbolically "Puritanical" style, the eldest Ames is defined as much by what he rejects as by what he believes.

This is not to say he was a negative man. He displays an uncanny ability, as does Anne Bradstreet, to find blessings in life's pains and disappointments. But the narrator also recalls how his mother, in kindhearted parody of the eldest Ames, first closes one of her own eyes before she attempts to find God's gift in the destruction of her henhouse and the ruination of a day's wash. The first John Ames's primary hermeneutic arises from finding a gift in loss (as Bradstreet and Shepard do). The narrator's mother's teasing impression underscores a

fundamental flaw in the seniormost Ames's outlook: it requires a singularity of perspective. While this surety doubtlessly offers comfort, it lacks the depth perception that follows from binocular vision.[10] A similar critique is also levied at Ames's elder brother Edward, who dropped the final *s* off of his name "Edwards" when he went to college, became an atheist, and dismissed his heritage out of hand. The necessity of maintaining a plurality of vision is essential in *Gilead*'s morality, a distinct contrast to the unswerving certitude exhibited by arch-New Englishmen like Thomas Hooker, John Endicott, and John Hathorne (to name just a few). Such depth may prove challenging to dogma and orthodoxy—plurality often does. That plurality also leads to progress, as the narrator ultimately demonstrates.

There is another subtle way in which Robinson critiques the grandfather, which comes in Ames's skillful deployment of two words: "old" and "just." *Gilead's* narrator remarks on his own tendency to rely too heavily on the word "just," and he is highly conscious in its application. "There is something real signified by that word 'just' that proper language won't acknowledge," he writes in clarification of an earlier comment: "when it's used . . . it does indicate a stress on the word that follows it, and also a particular pitch of the voice. People talk that way when they want to call attention to a thing existing in excess of itself" (28). Similarly, the young John Ames is "inclined to overuse the word 'old,' which actually has less to do with age . . . than it does with familiarity" (28). So when Ames comments of his grandfather that "he was just afire with old certainties" (31–32), the remark takes on heightened significance. These "old certainties" are as much familiar as they are depthless; though gently, Ames indicts his grandfather's visions for being projections of a desired reality more than a critical engagement with facts. All this suggests the narrator's very conscious departure from the aspects of the bleak Puritan way bestowed him by his grandfather.

Considering the jeremiad's proper place in spiritual instruction represents one of Ames's departures from seventeenth-century New English Calvinism. In preparing a sermon railing against the growing support for America's involvement in the Great War, Ames cites the devastating outbreak of Spanish Influenza as a sign of God's disapproval. He initially sees the epidemic as God's message against the "murder" taking place in the conflict. "The desire for war would bring the consequences of war" (42), he prepares to caution his audience. In simple but stirring words, citing biblical precedent, he is prepared to deliver his interpretation of God's word to his congregation: "It was quite a sermon,

I believe. I thought as I wrote it how pleased my father would have been. But my courage failed, because I knew the only people at the church would be a few old women who were already about as sad and apprehensive as they could stand to be and no more approving of the war than I was. And they were there even though I might have been contagious. I seemed ridiculous to myself for imagining that I could thunder from the pulpit in those circumstances" (42). Ames cannot see the point of dwelling on shortcomings, or of rallying the already fearful and disconsolate to an even higher degree of angst. Instead of dangling his parishioners over the figurative flames of hell, in the way that Jonathan Edwards does in "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," he drops his own jeremiad into a common household fire in the kitchen stove.[11] For Ames, dwelling on suffering would be simply gratuitous, the lesson to be learned far too obvious—and thus he leaves his grandfather's railing sermons behind him.

These departures from his grandfather's dogmatism provide a backdrop against which other, less typically Puritan virtues come to dominate the narrator's spiritual outlook. It is a shame that most students of contemporary American literature, if they know anything about Jonathan Edwards, know only "Sinners." Replete with terrifying imagery, Edwards's most famous of American sermons typifies the jeremiad so dramatically—and so effectively, and so affectively—that he is often thought of as essentially a dour figure and, sadly, characteristically Puritan.

But there is a very different Jonathan Edwards who rarely receives attention: a man possessed of scientific curiosity about and a love for the material world. Perhaps the best place to find this Jonathan Edwards is in his essay "Beauty of the World," which shows an "ecstatic view of the material world and nature that reflects [his] mystical side" (Smith, Stout, and Menkema xii). This Edwards can also be found in his series of fragments, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*. These observations of natural phenomena are "the draft of an idea fundamental to Edwards' thinking" (Miller 2); Edwards "expanded typology beyond the confines of Scripture into nature, history, and human experience, thereby anticipating the Transcendentalists of nineteenth-century New England" (Smith, Stout, and Menkema xiii). Edwards consistently affirms how "all of created reality is permeated with clues to divine truths, if we can but remove the scales from our eyes and see them" (xii).

Robinson reveals her debt to Jonathan Edwards's influence by making him the explicit namesake of two characters in *Gilead*—most notably Ames's atheistic brother. That both *Gilead* and the joyful Edwards channel John Calvin

might engender surprise, but unlike the stern Calvin Shy invokes to question Robinson's Calvinism, both Jonathan Edwards and *Gilead*'s Edwards depict a Calvin who would have every Christian embrace the world to a partial degree. According to David Steinmetz, Calvin insists that the natural world was once a vehicle for the knowledge of God before the Fall, but such knowledge is obviated by the "noetic effects of sin" (29). We cannot know God from what we see in the world, Calvin says, because our habits of sin have incapacitated our ability to learn about him through reason. Nevertheless, he is visible there. "The problem is not with the objective revelation of God in nature," Steinmetz summarizes, "but with the perception of God by fallen human reason" (30).

Those who see little of Calvinism in this approach, Robinson offers, do so because they see the reputation of Calvinism more so than his texts. Book Five of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* provides an extended discussion of the visibility of God in the world: "Since the perfection of blessedness consists in the knowledge of God (cf. John 17:3), he has been pleased, in order that none might be excluded from the means of obtaining felicity, not only to deposit in our minds that seed of religion of which we have already spoken, but so to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily place himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him" (I.v.1). This claim may deviate startlingly from the caricatured Calvin Robinson finds too often portrayed in the aforementioned "learned-looking books," but it does come from Calvin. So the implication may surprise modern readers to an even greater degree: even if God's "essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending human *thought*" (I.v.1., my emphasis), it is nonetheless present—and, more important, it is visible. For all his later railing on human "stupidity" (I.v.11), Calvin nevertheless continues to aver that the shortcoming arises at the level of cognition: either we fail to understand the message of natural beauty, or we draw faulty conclusions from the evidence.[12]

Gilead departs from Bradstreet's poetry and Jonathan Edward's *Images* on the point of reaching conclusions. Whereas Edwards, and Bradstreet before him, offered the beauty of the world as evidence of the glory of God beyond it, *Gilead* offers terrestrial beauty as sufficient inasmuch as it provides an experience of the divine. As Robinson herself explains in her essays, "I think the concept of transcendence is based on a misreading of creation. With all respect to heaven, the scene of miracle is here, among us. The eternal as an idea is much less preposterous than time, and this very fact should seize our attention" (*Adam* 243). *Gilead*'s imagistic fragments often explicate the nature of this miracle

and, I offer, draw attention to an extremely important theme in Robinson's writing. Her "miracle" teases out the suppressed thread, what Robinson calls a "better model" of Calvinism. This tradition gets lost in the current reductio ad absurdum that turns a complex system into the commonplace conclusion that the "Puritans" took "a lurid pleasure in the notion of hell" (*Adam* 151).

A good example of Robinson's method appears early on in *Gilead*, as Ames recalls traveling with his father from Iowa into the "wilderness" of Kansas to visit the grave of his grandfather, who originally hailed from New England. After much travail, they find the site in a state of considerable disrepair, and with tools borrowed from a kindhearted local, they "worked a good while putting things to rights" (13). Their work becomes a site of unexpected revelation for the young John, who witnesses the transformation of a "godforsaken" land—a word rendered weighty by its religious connotations—into a place of rare beauty. As his father is deep in prayer at the completion of their labor, Ames notices "a full moon rising just as the sun was going down" (14). He continues, "each of them was standing on its edge, with the most wonderful light between them. It seemed as if you could touch it, as if there were palpable currents of light passing back and forth, or as if there were great taut skeins of light suspended between them. I wanted my father to see it, but I knew I'd have to startle him out of his prayer, and I wanted to do it the best way, so I took his hand and kissed it. And then I said, 'Look at the moon.' And he did" (14). Such an astonishing sight leaves a lasting impact on the twelve-year-old boy, who previously "hadn't given much thought to the nature of the horizon" (15). And it jars his father out of his negative impression of Kansas; his father comments, "I never would have thought this place could be beautiful. I'm glad to know that" (15). Ames interrupts his father's prayer just as he interrupts his own narrative with his intensely imagistic observations. As father and son and the final memorial of their progenitor are situated, however briefly, at the center of the cosmos, the son begins to contemplate the nature of the horizon as the threshold of the terrestrial and the celestial. Meanwhile, his father recognizes that, seen in the right light, and perhaps with a little work, any place can be beautiful. Such will happen only if he looks for what can be seen in this life, rather than looking for what his experience has taught him to expect. Again, an irruption of the immediate into the Ames's consciousness brings about an altogether unique experience.

This scene synecdochically figures much of Robinson's writing about contemporary Calvinism: the Ameses' attention to the memorial for their

Maine-born father recalls her midwestern Congregationalist tending to the legacy of northeastern Congregationalism. Ames finds good reason for this westward expansion. "The topsoil in Iowa goes down so deep," he reflects, "that more and larger tunnels were possible here than in less favored regions, say in New England" (58). At the literal level, he is observing the physical conditions that rendered Iowa a more suitable region for the development of stations along the Underground Railroad. Figuratively, however, Robinson's essays clarify Ames's repudiation of New England's rocky temperament: an often-overlooked but very real history of slavery; a pattern of bloody, intolerant persecution; and a theological austerity that, even in the minds of luminaries like Bradstreet and Jonathan Edwards, resulted in the suppression of joy and a consequent inflation of anxiety about the afterlife.[13]

MIGRATING THE PILGRIMS

Pushing Edwards westward, as it were, strikes me as essentially this novel's aim, bringing New England's Congregationalist writing into a differing light of the present.[14] If *Gilead* tidies up Edwards's legacy (as the Ameses do for their father and grandfather), it does so by pruning the conclusions from some of his more evocatively imagistic observations. An exemplary fragment from *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* shows Edwards attempting to read the world as an allegory for the transcendent: "The heavens' being filled with glorious, luminous bodies is to signify the glory and happiness of the heavenly inhabitants, and amongst these the sun signifies Christ and the moon the church" (44). Taking cues from Calvin, however, Ames contents himself with limited observations about the sun and the moon, setting aside any attempts to draw conclusions from the empirical. For if reason only impairs our perception of the world, then why let reason in on the process at all?

In the Kansas graveyard scene, Robinson enriches the Edwardsean method of interpreting the sun and moon by scaling back the method's goals. Edwards's own "Personal Narrative" boasts that his conversion experience eventually effected "sweet abstraction from all the concerns of this world" (284); not long thereafter, "the appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be a[n . . .] appearance of divine glory in almost everything" (285). He ultimately concludes from this that "the highest beauty and amiableness, above all other beauties . . . was a *divine* beauty; far purer than anything here upon earth; and that everything else, was like mire, filth and defilement, in comparison of it" (287). Too much investment in the effort to extract knowledge of God from the beauty of the world makes the world ugly to him.

Not so in *Gilead*. Ames displays trepidation in interrupting his father's prayer, but nevertheless does so—with a kiss. He decides that the elder man's purely spiritual, abstract meditation is trumped by the rare beauty of the world about. By an act of touch, he brings his father back into the world for a spiritual experience more immediate, if only for its rarity, than a quotidian act of prayer directed to the transcendent. And later, the young Ames contemplates the horizon and the elder observes something he thought he never would: beauty where he least expects it.

Spurning the transcendent, Ames privileges the incandescent. In adhering to this principle, he does not deny the heavenly: he simply leaves the heavenly for its (non)time and (non)place. For the time being, he emphasizes the people and the things of this world. "When people come to speak to me, whatever they say, I am struck by a kind of incandescence in them, the 'I' whose predicate can be 'love' or 'fear' or 'want'" (Robinson, *Gilead* 44), he says early on; later, he opines that "the best thing in life, [is] that little incandescence you see in people" (53). These are specific manifestations of the general greatness of creation; Ames explains his idea of the end of the physical universe as "the great and general incandescence" (247). But they are no less wonderful in their specificity.

What may be most remarkable about Robinson's recognition of the preeminence of immanence in Congregationalist letters develops in her own form. She says volumes about key issues by stopping short of saying anything conclusive. Hence, in a concession of ignorance, long before he concludes his letter, Ames admits to his son: "This is another thing you know and I don't—how this ends" (73). And then he ends the letter without concluding; he instead gestures to the long life his son has ahead of him, and what his fatherly hopes for his son are. *Gilead* does not entirely devalue the kind of reason that might lead to inductions from the evidence of things seen. Ames reasons sagely throughout, even on his own shortcomings. Perception, however, does not require reason; pure perception, *Gilead* posits, can mark the highest form of spiritual experience. Indeed, Ames asserts this quite candidly when confessing, "I have been thinking about existence lately. In fact, I have been so full of admiration for existence that I have hardly been able to enjoy it properly" (56). Admiration, a form of reflecting on perception, obscures proper enjoyment for Ames.

Of course, on other issues, Robinson does come to clear conclusions. In particular, both the essays and the fictions insist that there truly is a kinder, gentler Calvin: much of "Puritans and Prigs" works to resituate the doctrine of innate depravity within a context of Calvin's own writings, demonstrating that since all men are depraved, therefore all men have something in common. Such

an attitude blurs the divisive distinction between elect and preterit and elevates shared human qualities.[15] Robinson makes a virtue of a kind of an everyday preterition—"the act of passing by, disregarding, or omitting" (one definition of the word)—in favor of theological preterition, the Calvinist doctrine that some are damned a priori, no matter what they do. Thus *Gilead* "passes over" the opportunity to draw conclusions from the material in order to bring her lyrical preterition to the fore. She instead quotes a generous Calvin who emphasizes community service over love of self; she points to a humanistic thinker, rather than the theologian who felt obligated to his own tradition. (After all, innate depravity is a doctrine original not to Calvin, but to Augustine, later amplified by Luther—a Reformation tradition to which he was bound in order to most fully articulate the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.)

In addition, Robinson reminds her readers that Calvin's writings are texts like all others, and thus they require interpretation and reinterpretation. Conventional wisdom with respect to Calvinism, she laments, looks too often to the Rapture, where she reads rhapsody. As Ames puts it, "Calvin says somewhere that each of us is an actor on a stage and God is the audience. That metaphor has always interested me, because it makes us the artists of our behavior, and the reaction of God to us might be thought of as aesthetic rather than morally judgmental in the ordinary sense. How well do we understand our role? With how much assurance do we perform it? . . . I do like Calvin's image . . . because it suggests how God might actually enjoy us. I believe we think about that far too little (*Gilead* 124). Thus Robinson holds Calvinism up against the "Puritan" tradition of Calvinism (which I maintain retroactively modifies the subjects it purports to represent) embroidered with the more beautiful threads of Bradstreet and Edwards. She chooses to interpret their texts as evidence of that God enjoys man rather than despises his fallen status.

Ames's spiritual autobiography, however, skirts the trap of being overly optimistic about earthly beauty. The character weaknesses he admits are not pro forma gestures of humility, nor do they merely efface his agency from the lessons he offers—as in the case of Bradstreet and Shepard—although they do have this effect. Neither do they solely position him as the synthesis in the Amesian dialectic of militaristic father and pacifistic son, though such is also partly the case as well. His anger, "the one thing I should have learned from [my father and grandfather] that I did not learn . . . to control" (6), ends up polluting what otherwise made up the most beautiful and joyful years of his life.

Ames's anger admits darkness into a world in which he would prefer only

light. The persistent specter of racism compounds Jack Boughton's misbehavior, and Ames's subsequent failure to forgive him, all of which cloud the halcyon luminosity Ames would rather his young son see in his life. Were he to simply ignore these wrongs, he would be ignoring the kind of vision granted his grandfather, "without [which] the people perish" (85): the vision which sees the suffering of Christ at the exploitation and mistreatment of "even the least of them" (Matthew 25:40). Ames must admit his own shortcomings if his letter is to be of any real value to his son. In the larger framework of Robinson's writings, she enjoins us to identify the better attributes of America's Calvinist predecessors. In the end, she offers her "better model to proceed from" in Calvin's own writing, rather than a settled outlook on New English writing (*Death of Adam* 171).

Robinson's "better model" of the past resembles Anne Bradstreet's constant efforts to seek the spiritual behind the material, showing us that those called Puritans, too, struggled with and loved this earth. It exchanges proofs of the existence of God for appreciation of the beauty of the material world for its own sake, finding the "little incandescence" sufficient and setting aside the "great and general" for later. She implies that if America were to follow this thread, rather than the one that leads to suspicion of and alienation from the Protestants' secular world, or if those that did not follow at least acknowledged and understood this trajectory, her readers might find grounds for connection and celebrate the incandescence in everyone.

RETURNING, *HOME*

That too many Americans have failed the test of tolerance Robinson advocates is made obvious by scholar Christopher Douglas, who demonstrates the danger in failing to account for a Christian legacy of supporting slavery. *Gilead*'s narrative, Douglas avers, centers on questions about the appropriate role of violent actions in opposing chattel slavery; in so doing, he pointedly asserts, Robinson effectively "begs the question: should a Christian oppose slavery, or support it?" (335). Indeed, it might be fairly said that *Gilead* risks "forgetting about Christian slavery"; yet in neglecting to address her novel *Home*, Douglas's reading of Robinson breaks down when he accuses her of "dishonestly cleansing 'true' Christianity of its history by 'forgetting' unsavory aspects" of that history (351).

Robinson pairs Ames's version of the Boughton narrative with Glory's in order to access the complexity of the past as well as the present. If Ames's narrative theologically justifies inactivity in the face of racism, then Glory's tale of Boughton's experiences with Jack indicts an otherwise good man for his sadly

commonplace racism. If Ames's grandfather cleanses Christianity's history too thoroughly of its association with slavery, and if Ames fails to grapple meaningfully with the fire set to the church serving Gilead's black community, then *Home*'s borderland viewpoint—between the Deep South and urban North—reminds its readers that Iowa and Indiana unite New England with the South under the banner of shame and guilt. Taken together, the two novels provide a kind of parallax view on a modern midwestern "Puritanism." Depending on one's vantage and predispositions, New English legacies in the Midwest mean very different things. In tandem, the books exemplify how cultural memories really work and how basic facts signify different things for different people. The reader of *Gilead* knows about Jack Boughton's complicated St. Louis relationship with a woman of color, and knows her father refuses to accept the rehabilitated rascal owing to Jack's agnosticism; meanwhile, Missouri law prohibits the couple from cohabitating. *Home*'s tension resides in the question of the reveal. When will national civil rights issues develop from distant abstractions into immediate concerns in the WASP nest that is Gilead?

Jack departs the home where he never really felt welcome because his father, the venerable minister, is tacitly racist in his indifferent legalism. When watching televised footage of Montgomery police brutality, Boughton's backwardness on questions of civil rights comes to the fore. Deeply frustrated by police actions toward the nonviolent activists, Jack blasphemes by shouting "Jesus Christ!," raising his father's ire: "That kind of language has never been acceptable in this house," Boughton chides (*Home* 97). In caustic irony, Glory's narrative details her father's response: "The old man said, 'I do believe it is necessary to enforce the law. The Apostle Paul says we should do everything "decently and in order." You can't have people running around the streets like that'" (98). Thus Boughton condemns his son's mere use of words while explaining away white police brutality with the authority of the Christian gospel. Using Paul's apostolic doctrine—rather than Jesus's dictum to abide by the spirit, not the letter of the law (a central theme of the Gospel of Luke)—Robinson's novel dramatizes the conditions in which meaningful conversations about race can be suppressed by oppressive Christian doctrinaires.

In *Home*'s Gilead as in 1953 St. Louis, there is no place for Jack and his black lover, Della. Even Glory, given her only chance to introduce herself to Jack's son, introduces herself by saying "I'm your father's sister" (322). Seemingly unaware, Glory is part of the reason that Gilead registers as "a foreign and hostile country" to Della and her family, for she fails to connect as kin

to the young boy. She identifies as Jack's sister, not the boy's aunt. Almost in response to *Gilead*'s progressive Iowa, Glory and her father emphasize its persistent exclusivity.

Seen this way, the dyad of *Gilead* and *Home* stand out as noteworthy contributions to modern interpretations of the New English religious legacy. Each novel is a discrete entity, and reflects a total reality in its own right; at the same time, they function together to provide the slightest glimpse into a multiverse theory of American history. Neither Ames nor Boughton nor Glory should be viewed as definitive; instead, each has a claim to the past that hermeneutically bears on the other. Moving across the varied systems of their visions, we can also see how the tensions of race, and tests of inclusion to full Americanness, filled every corner of life in the mid-twentieth century. Robinson's reverence for the Puritan brand nevertheless underscores its growing place in the test of Americanness to which the legacy of our settled Puritanism subjects all America's people.

6

TYPES OF EXCEPTIONALISM

COLSON WHITEHEAD, RONALD REAGAN, JOHN KENNEDY, PAUL AUSTER

So, we've got to teach history based not on what's in fashion, but what's important—why the Pilgrims came here.

—Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation"

Three years prior to the publication of Colson Whitehead's third novel, *Apex Hides the Hurt*, New Hampshire lawmakers successfully passed legislation to rebrand Mt. Clay, a peak within the "presidential" section of the White Mountains, as Mt. Reagan. I suspect Reagan would have found it both unsurprising and frustrating how federal regulations initially prevented New Hampshire's intended change, and that the US Geological Survey continues to block the intended renaming (Bunch 11; Jensen n.p.). For those who know Whitehead's fiction, New Hampshire's efforts may call to mind *Apex Hides the Hurt*'s main plotline, in which a "nomenclature consultant," who dreams up names for consumer products, is hired to settle a dispute among three council members about whether to rename their nondescript Midwestern town, known as Winthrop. Unlike the New Hampshire legislature, however, Winthrop's government leaders cannot resolve their differences about whether the town should be renamed at all, and if so, what that name should be.

The Granite State legislature's controversial move to make mountainous the controversial president's name was driven by the Reagan Legacy Project: begun in 1997, the Grover Norquist-led group Americans for Tax Reform worked to rename at least one notable entity for Ronald Reagan in each US county by the year 2000 (D'Agastino 19). Believing that Reagan's image, and thus his ideology's influence, could be improved by making his brand more visible, the

Legacy Project hoped to associate Reagan with positive government institutions through the trope of metonymy. Norquist himself admitted that the renaming strategy endeavored to reform public opinion regarding Reagan's policies—particularly his domestic economic agenda (Norquist 5).

New Hampshire's failure to restyle Mt. Clay resonates with *Apex Hides the Hurt*. References to peaks are not the least of the stories' connections: both call attention to the power of names in shaping our sense of the past. Owing to their obvious political differences, it might be odd to think of a conservative such as Norquist and the prominent public intellectual Henry Louis Gates as of like mind on any issue. Yet Gates also recognizes the power exerted by names on perceptions of the past, claiming that "to name [a] tradition is to rename each of its antecedents, no matter how pale they might seem. To rename is to revise, and to revise is to Signify" (xxiii). As I argue at greater length elsewhere, *Apex*'s conceit attempts to rename, and thus revise, what the Winthrop moniker means in contemporary America.[1]

At *Apex*'s diegetic level, the historical revision manifests in the form of recovering a lost point of view and seeing the past from that perspective. Such recoveries are often figured in historical fiction as the correction of injustices, as an effort to give agency to persons whom history has forgotten. At the formal level, the novel's operation is far more complex: it signifies on the legacy of John Winthrop after Reagan's political rhetoric reshaped the relatively obscure colonial governor into a "founding father."[2] *Apex* calls attention to recent redefinitions of the Winthrop legacy and it pushes back against Reagan's oversimplification of the Puritan myth (as well as the Reagan Legacy Project's influence on his economic legacy). At the same time, it exposes how ostensible gains in executive opportunities for nonwhite Americans can serve as a distraction from the reality of increasing economic disparity within the United States. The novel does not, overall, pretend to right any historical wrongs; moreover, it describes a painful recognition that needs to be acknowledged before America can progress further in assuring equal economic opportunities for all its citizens. Reagan's Puritan myth, Whitehead underscores, enacts a kind of economic violence on black Americans from colonial times right through to the writing of this book.

Whitehead reminds us just how whitewashed the mythologized Puritans have become in certain corners of the American popular imaginary. Amid Cold War tensions and now in the terror-stricken twenty-first century, American politicians and pundits revivified and sustained an ancient meme—that of "the city upon a hill"—to assert America's exceptional status in world affairs. Loosely

prefigured in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:14), these words and the sentiment they invoke are nevertheless most commonly attributed to John Winthrop, the Massachusetts Bay Colony's first governor and recently rediscovered "founding father."[3] Ostensibly delivered in 1630, his lay sermon, "A Modell of Christian Charity," is now so famous as to have been adjudged the most influential sermon of its millennium (Gomes 102–3). Although Winthrop's "Model" may well be a reliable record of Winthrop's words, it also may be just an approximation of them, or even a hazy recollection, since the draft handed down to us was recorded in two different scripts, neither of which matches Winthrop's own handwriting. Therefore, we cannot know the location of the speech's delivery, nor its time, nor can we definitively establish that Winthrop said the things so widely anthologized, studied, and cited today. "Do we need to know with certainty when, where and whether Winthrop actually gave the most famous speech of 17th-century America—one that continues to resonate hundreds of years later?" asks Ted Widmer. "It is disconcerting not to have the exact coordinates. But history depends more than we care to admit on the survival of fugitive pieces of paper, and in this case all we have is one fragile document guarding its secrets. We can work only with what we have" ("Who Built This City?"). To Widmer, I would respond that there are many kinds of work interpreters of the settled Puritan do: often, in *Apex* and the other novels studied in this book, such work involves an imaginative rereading of that particular piece of paper to tease out what has been forgotten and what it might yet have to tell a nation about itself.

Though we cannot determine the influence of Winthrop's sermon in his own time, many of America's most powerful twentieth- and twenty-first-century leaders have remade that document anew with each generation, constructing and reconstructing a Puritan origin suited to historically contingent ideological purposes. How remarkable it is that these politicians cite John Winthrop's speech, rather than the Christian gospels he paraphrased; how remarkable that, for so many American commentators and candidates, whether conservative or liberal, Republican or Democratic, Winthrop's words seem to exert more authority than those attributed to the Christian God. Given the political importance of how Americans perceive their Puritan lineage, it is unsurprising that postmodern novelists have responded in kind, resisting a predominant tendency, known as typology, to read the past as evidence of a predestined future. If, as I argue in chapter 2, neither Hawthorne nor Gaddis sees any hope in destroying the approximated Puritan as model, then later writers have found an

inspiring cause in offering alternative interpretations of New English colonial history and literature.

Demonstrating a keen familiarity with America's typological tendencies, Paul Auster takes the phenomenon of the mythical Puritan to a delightfully literal level in *City of Glass*. His Henry Dark is an ur-Puritan, one who has no grounding in actuality but possesses all of historical fact's discursive force. Dark was born into the American literary-historical landscape in 1985, the year Auster published his first novel. Whether or not Ronald Reagan's resurrected Puritan forefathers influenced Auster's ludic semiotic mystery novel I cannot say (though Sylvia Söderlind appears convinced [14]); in any case, Dark serves as the ideal character to demonstrate how American literature seems to embrace openly the notion that the Puritans as presently understood never really existed in the seventeenth century. *City of Glass* begins with Daniel Quinn, a successful but despondent writer of pulp detective stories published under the pseudonymous William Wilson. His heroic Private Dick, Max Work, solves all his mysteries with cool professionalism. One day, Quinn mistakenly receives a call for a "real" (in the world of the novel) private detective named Paul Auster. Partly out of curiosity and partly resisting the weight of sloth that crippled him after the loss of his wife and child, Quinn pretends to be Auster, and takes the case.[4]

At first, Quinn's charge seems simple: protect one Peter Stillman from his father, a disgraced former Harvard professor also named Peter Stillman. After the loss of his wife, the elder Stillman locked his then very young son in a darkened room, denying him all contact with other people. His goal was to determine if the boy would learn to speak an innate "natural language," one that the Harvard researcher believed God had given all mankind, but that had been lost when the Tower of Babel was dashed. After an apartment fire exposed the horrifying experiment to the world, the elder Stillman was imprisoned and had only recently been released from jail. Subsequent to his father's liberation, the younger Peter was concerned for his own safety, and hence hired "Auster" as protection. Along the way, Quinn (now Auster) looks up the "real" Paul Auster—the only man of that name—in the New York City telephone directory. Instead of reaching a private detective, he finds a writer much like himself. The character "Paul Auster" in the novel is writing an essay on Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, another D.Q. whose quest Daniel Quinn quite clearly recapitulates.

City of Glass teems with doubling, with the doubling of doubles, and with historical allusions, offering the literary critic a wealth of material. For example, Max Work—he shares the initials of that great student of the legacy of

puritanical Protestantism, Max Weber, whose own research centered largely on the idea of the necessity of "work" (labor) in the construction of the individual Western identity. With the seemingly endless play of references, Auster's novel sends readers so far outside, and yet also folds so frequently back onto itself, that the reader, like the protagonist, can easily become completely lost. It is, to use a word that is almost as amorphous and polysemous as "Puritan" itself, an exemplary "postmodern" novel.

City of Glass describes Henry Dark as a Puritan thinker whose colonial American linguistic theories allegedly inspired Peter Stillman Sr.'s linguistic research program. *City of Glass* makes its Puritan's nonexistence literally the case, at least with respect to Dark, by revealing that Stillman simply invented his Puritan tradition for the precedent he needed to justify his modern actions. As a young scholar, Stillman gave this Henry Dark a very complex biblically based reason for seeking out God's "natural language." Dark was, Stillman writes in his counterfeit scholarly study, convinced that the rediscovery of man's innate tongue can undo the loss brought about by the fall of Babel's tower, and complete the New English errand of ensuring the establishment of God's heavenly kingdom on this earth. In Adam's state of innocence, Stillman theorizes in reading John Milton, the naming of animals in the Garden of Eden was not mere representation. Instead, "his words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life. A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God. The story of the Garden, therefore, records not only the fall of man, but the fall of language" (Auster 70). The telos of Christianity, Stillman's thesis posits, aspires to realign the world with the language that describes it, specifically in "Puritan America."[5] "What all this had to do with the New World Quinn could not say. But then a new chapter started, and suddenly Stillman was discussing the life of Henry Dark, a Boston clergyman who was born in London in 1649 (on the day of Charles I's execution), came to America in 1675, and died in a fire in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1691" (73). Auster develops this "argument" with characteristic playfulness. For one, Stillman's monograph asserts that John Milton represents "orthodox Puritan" belief: a humorous claim both in light of the absence of anything resembling New English orthodoxy, but also considering that Milton is notoriously idiosyncratic in his theological positions and is, at best, only arguably considered a Puritan by some scholars.

Nevertheless, the idealism of Stillman's dissertation merely exaggerates many real colonial New Englanders' "saintly" goals. "*The New Babel*, written in bold, Miltonic prose, presented the case for the building of paradise in America. Unlike the other writers on the subject, Dark did not assume paradise to be a place that could be discovered. . . . Rather, its existence was immanent in man himself: the idea of a beyond he might someday create in the here and now. For utopia was nowhere—even, as Dark explained, in its 'wordhood.' And if man could bring forth this dreamed-of place, it would be by building it with his own two hands" (75). As I interpret it, Henry Dark emblematizes the settled Puritan in American literary history. He is invented within a context to provide a putatively historical justification—a sense of precedent—for an agent's or group's specific ends. Dark's creation effectively reveals the status of Puritanism-as-model in the process of producing America's essential identity, by retroactively installing an essence into history that never existed there in the first place. Yet Dark shares many of the qualities of "real" Puritans—he exists in documents (sometimes recorded after the fact) and is grounded in literary authority (Stillman falsely claims Dark was an assistant to John Milton). All this eerily recalls John Winthrop's famed lay sermon, "A Modell of Christian Charity," which also issues from a suspect hand.

By the early 1600s, the predominant Protestant worldview in New England evolved into the New English colonists' uneasy distinction between original and copy, between a metaphor's vehicle and its tenor, a point Tracy Fessenden emphasizes. "Appeals to scripture to justify Puritan occupation, like Puritan rhetorical practice more generally" she explains, "made no strict separation between literal and metaphorical usage, or between what Augustine called the carnal and spiritual significations of words" (21). Winthrop's "A Modell of Christian Charity" offers perhaps the most clarifying example, because of its currency: best known now for portraying the New English colonists as erecting a "city upon a hill," the sermon more extensively articulates how Christian charity, practiced as Winthrop advocates, makes manifest the body of Christ. Winthrop's metaphor collapses the distinction between a Massachusetts religious society and the body of Christ itself, asserting outright that "Christ and his church make one body" and that "all true Christians are of one body in Christ" (153). Sacvan Bercovitch sees a similar confusion of spiritual and literal in John Cotton's typology; by the time his grandson Cotton Mather wrote *Magnalia Christi Americana*, the Protestants of the early seventeenth century were set in a lineage of meaning equating them with biblical fathers (*Puritan Origins* 35–71).

These men, such as Bradford and Winthrop, were not held to be mere abstractions personified, nor were they held forth as allegories of the transcendent spiritual realm. They were seen as fulfillments in history of facts prophesied in the Old Testament (Lowance 141). It stands to (inductively) reason, from Mather's point of view, that evangelicals of the eighteenth century would continue not simply copying, but indeed *being* the spiritual exemplars who made America the continuing model, and not simply a copy of God's perfect society.

A later American leader linked to Christian utopianism, via "Camelot," John F. Kennedy provides a striking and perhaps surprising example of a twentieth-century American politician who demonstrates America's continued faith in typology. Days before assuming the office of president, after running a bruising campaign against Richard Nixon, the only non-Protestant elected president in US history returned once more to the state where he and his political career were born. In a speech delivered at the state house, Kennedy announced that he was not leaving Massachusetts behind, but instead bringing its tradition to the White House with him as a guiding principle. Arguing for a kind of Massachusetts exceptionalism, Kennedy first quoted Pericles's dictum to the Athenians that "we do not imitate—for we are a model to others" (note he uses the term "model" to frame his discussion of America, in the past and his present). He then turned his focus to his home state's early history. "I speak neither from false provincial pride nor artful political flattery. For no man about to enter high office in this country can ever be unmindful of the contribution this state has made to our national greatness," he explained. "Its leaders have shaped our destiny long before the great republic was born. Its principles have guided our footsteps in times of crisis as well as in times of calm." As one of the "enduring qualities of Massachusetts" Kennedy listed "the common threads of the Pilgrim and the Puritan," claiming they "are an indelible part of my life, my convictions, my view of the past, and my hopes for the future" (Kennedy 56). In fine terms, he both bound and severed the two groups of reform-minded Christian sectarians who colonized early New England, while also claiming a Protestant lineage (as Teddy Roosevelt advocated) to validate his Americanness. "I have been guided by the standard John Winthrop set before his shipmates on the flagship *Arbella* 331 years ago, as they, too, faced the task of building a new government on a new and perilous frontier," he assured his audience. Then, as proof, he quoted Winthrop: "'We must always consider,' he said, 'that we shall be as a city upon a hill—the eyes of all people are upon us.'" Affirming his Puritan exceptionalist bona fides, Kennedy presses on. "Today the eyes of all people are

truly upon us—and our government, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill—constructed and inhabited by men aware of their grave trust and their great responsibilities" (56–57). Given Kennedy's penchant for reference and allusion, Winthrop's famous speech feels like a natural source of inspiration in Kennedy's process of "constructing an administration." At least that is what he invited his fellow Bay Staters to believe, perhaps out of anxiety about his Catholic heritage, or perhaps because appealing to the authority of Puritan myths had been a mainstay of American rhetoric since well before his time.

Utopian, Paul Auster is not. At a time when history and criticism cast doubt on the notion of a stable American identity, Paul Auster's *City of Glass* affirmed what deconstructive habits of mind make clear: in typology, the copy actually produces and thus precedes the model. Therefore, the claimed origin was never in the past from which the typologist derives his claim to inheritance. Tellingly, one of the novel's most engaging scenes takes place in a restaurant called "The Mayflower," as though that ship's deck remains a site which can be rebuilt and revisited whenever Americans need to speak directly about what makes certain actions cohere. Auster's detective ultimately learns, however, that his foe's beliefs are founded on a story only claiming factual status but actually fabricated to serve the pseudoscholar's contemporary aims. In this way, Auster dramatizes in fiction too many Americans' real abuses of the "Puritan" past; he also playfully (ab)uses the purported distinction between Pilgrim and Puritan to underscore how such naming practices work and are worked when useful to a given speaker or writer.

Moreover, Stillman uses Dark to justify his horrifying experiments on his son. In so doing he echoes the advocates of Manifest Destiny, who reinvented New English claims to adverse possession of indigenous Americans' territories by "improving" their neglected lands. That Dark is merely a figment of Stillman's imagination also mirrors Americans' greater familiarity with Hawthorne's and Reagan's historical innovations than with John Cotton's sermons or Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*. Kennedy's exceptionalism served to justify military escalation in Vietnam, while Reagan leaned upon his vision of the "shining city on a hill" to stock that hill with staggering numbers of nuclear warheads.

In 1961, debates about the separate Pilgrim and Puritan communities meant a great deal to many New Englanders; Kennedy knowingly drew on these debates to assure a local audience that he had not forgotten his Protestant New English roots.[6] Winthrop was a "Puritan," according to 1960s Massachusetts

parlance, whereas the "Pilgrims" had already been in the New World for a full decade before Winthrop's arrival in 1630. Under the leadership of William Bradford, the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth Plantation to protest the Church of England's insufficient reform of "Papist" ceremony, giving up hope in the mother country and investing it in newly opened American land. Supported by a trading group called the Merchant Adventurers, the Pilgrims set out to what they thought was the northern edge of the Virginia territory (now known as the Hudson River), missed the mark by a few hundred miles, and, having arrived in late autumn before a brutal Massachusetts winter, hunkered down for good. These Reformers were what is technically known as "separating nonconformists" —in that they did not conform to Anglican Christian practice and wanted to separate their church from the King's—and sought to build a permanent home away from England to develop their ideal community.

John Winthrop, on the other hand, was in charge of a much larger group. Whereas the one hundred-twenty souls who braved the *Mayflower* voyage comprised a fleet of one ship, Winthrop's leading force in the Great Migration was eleven ships strong and carried over seven hundred settlers. While neither group was composed solely of religious activists, Winthrop's was primarily a group of religious dissenters (nonconformists) but relative political moderates: they otherwise maintained their allegiance to the Crown and its church. These "Puritans," as they are best known, differed dramatically from the Church of England with respect to points of theology and other ecclesiastical matters. They hoped to erect their own church structure in the New World and, having formed a model that proved its superiority to the Anglican structure, convince England of the rightness of their (what we would call fundamentalist) Calvinist ways. They expected, eventually, to return home; indeed, many did.

Departing from England at different times, under different conditions, and with slightly different outcomes in mind, the "Puritans" nevertheless shared a great deal of common belief with the "Pilgrims." Over the next century, the dynamic states of English New World colonialism fused the two groups and, by 1693, effectively rendered the distinction less rather than more meaningful (at least, as I argue in chapter 1, until the Plymouth bicentennial squabbles rekindled in the 1820s). At the start, they were distinct colonies with divergent attitudes about what they were doing in the New World. Despite these facts, the claim that the Pilgrims and Puritans uniformly shaped the destiny of the United States "long before the great republic was born" continues to hold as truth for many nationalist narratives of America's ascension. Kennedy's assertions about

the predestined shape (and, implicitly, the color) of America feel less like an interpretation of the facts than the statement of a preordained inevitability. Subtle but unmistakable, these are core beliefs that underpin Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism. By Kennedy's time the Pilgrims and the Puritans—both splinter groups zealously opposed to the religious dictates of their time and believing themselves handpicked by God to shape the world in their own image—became iconic, if ironic, touchstones for measuring Americanness in a period marked by its insistence on conformity.

As Colson Whitehead's *Apex Hides the Hurt* reminds us, the revisionist rhetoric that makes Winthrop a forefather of democracy covers up his assumption of naturalized class difference; it also ignores the reality that for many black Americans, history does not necessarily entail economic progress.[7] Winthrop, like Henry Dark, suits the needs of his interpreters: with the ambivalent pull between tradition and American teleology, Ronald Reagan is able to transform Kennedy's characterization of the New English colonial project into a vision of America as both dynamic and static, open-ended for some but closed off to most. As in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century visions of providential history clearing the ground for America's emergence, Ronald Reagan's political message shared with Kennedy's the professed belief that Americans were selected to fulfill God's preordained destiny for world history. In his 1974 speech to the first Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), Reagan began incorporating the famed Winthrop trope in his own narrative of American character formation. His grand speech opened by exonerating what his Democratic opponents derided as backward policies proffered by American conservatives; to these opponents Reagan delivered a corrective history. Regan confessed that "you may call it mysticism if you want to," but "I have always believed that there was some divine plan that placed this continent between two oceans" (3), distilling American providential historiography down to one of its simplest expressions.

Reagan's address to the first CPAC insisted that America's "heritage sets [it] apart" (3) from the rest of the world's nations, reiterating a claim about the Puritans made by the very men called Puritans. As evidence, he relates a story he claims to have once heard, from a writer, about an anonymous speaker whose eloquence swayed the wavering fifty-six signatories declaring America free from their king. Supposedly, Reagan stipulates, this aging man mustered, with the power of his voice, a reluctant majority to stand up against threats of death; supposedly, Reagan maintains, this story can be found in the writings of Thomas Jefferson. Though he "never researched or made an effort to verify

it" (3), Reagan liked the details of this legend as he heard them; in a speech about history, Reagan's preference for what the past could have been was more important than verifying what the past actually was. He outlined sacrifices made by some signers of the Declaration, but failed to note how wealthy many others already were or ultimately became. He trumpeted the world's admiration for the Constitution, but failed to mention the world's many skeptics, including some American citizens, at the time it was adopted. He valorized the War of 1812, failing to name it (despite, or maybe because of, its ambiguous conclusion). And he detailed the story of Navy Captain Duncan Ingraham's valiant defense of the rights of a Hungarian political refugee of newly minted US citizenship, without mentioning that Ingraham later served and died as an officer in the rebel Confederate navy. In compiling his list of American virtues, Reagan made either very careless or very calculating selections from the historical register to rally his growing constituency.

Following this list of American virtues, Reagan cited the source text of the American exceptionalism used to justify US military might: "standing on the tiny deck of the *Arabella* [sic] in 1630 off the Massachusetts coast, John Winthrop said, 'we will be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause Him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world.' Well, we have not dealt falsely with our God, even if He is temporarily suspended from the classroom" ("City" 10). In the context of the full CPAC speech, the Winthrop reference seems both out of temporal sequence and a non sequitur. This quotation of the seminal Winthrop sermon sits between separate oceans of thought, one detailing the abuses of government largesse and another extolling America's quality of life. But the turn to Winthrop is out of neither logical nor temporal place, at least in the Reagan narrative; his appropriation and approximation of the past as indicative of the "truth" of America can never really be out of order, since all the past is equally ready-to-hand for use in his present.

Reagan continued to emphasize Winthrop's inaugural position in American history throughout his political career. Speaking as the Republican nominee for reelection to the presidency in 1983, Reagan did not quote Pericles to validate his rhetorical authority (as Kennedy had). He instead cited a first-grader from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, then shortly thereafter proclaimed: "Four years ago we raised a banner of bold colors—no pale pastels. We proclaimed a dream of an America that would be 'a shining city on a hill'" (322). In this

speech, Reagan used a slightly inaccurate quotation to conjoin Winthrop's history with the United States in the 1980s.

Kennedy's speech acknowledged, however minutely, the political differences between Plymouth and Boston; by 1989 Reagan conflated Winthrop's Puritans with the Pilgrims' mission, a move that effectively renders John Winthrop no mere leader of a splinter religious sect but indeed a type of "Founding Father." Reagan's "Farewell Address" contended that Winthrop's utopian ideal presaged American progress in the twentieth century.[8] "The past few days," Reagan explained, "I've thought a bit of the shining city upon a hill.' The phrase comes from John Winthrop, who wrote it to describe the America he imagined. What he imagined was important because he was an early Pilgrim, an early freedom man. He journeyed here on what today we'd call a little wooden boat; and like the other Pilgrims, he was looking for a home that would be free." Sensing an opportunity to clarify an important point, he continues: "I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still" (Reagan 326–27). Although Winthrop and his crew were not seeking political separation from the Crown, Reagan's narrative needs that sense of rebelliousness for his origin narrative of America—Puritan, Revolutionary, Conservative—to make sense. With rhetorical sleight of hand, Winthrop's theocratic "city upon a hill" is transformed into Reagan's gilded bastion of republican (and Republican) freedom, a "shining city on a hill." Kennedy needs his Pilgrims separated from his Puritans in order to demonstrate his membership in America's ethnic Christianity despite his Catholicism; Reagan need not make such distinctions. By the 1980s, Reagan's Presbyterian belief sat just to the side of (or, in some definitions, squarely within) the modern category of "the Puritan tradition"; as such, his Americanness was less at issue than was Kennedy's.

Whitehead forthrightly airs his skepticism about attempts to rebrand what is obviously an Old World European economic structure. While his novel's protagonist, a namesmith, contemplates whether he should change the Winthrop legacy to "New Prospera" or "Freedom," he ultimately picks "Struggle." Neither blindly optimistic moniker serves as the right name for the legacy of

America's New English origin, particularly in reference to the black population. With great care, and little solace, Whitehead's protagonist carefully makes what he feels is the right choice to highlight Winthrop's continuing relevance in discourses on recent American economic history. At the time of this writing, political liberals have chosen to engage, rather than ignore, Winthrop's sermon. Barack Obama appealed to the well-worn narrative in his own 2006 address to students at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, stitching the colonists to America's flag, rather than praising, say, the less religiously minded George Washington. E. J. Dionne also took up the subject: the left-leaning editorialist for the *Washington Post* and frequent contributor to NBC's *Meet the Press* tried to refashion Winthrop's rhetoric, rather than deal with the sticky problem that Winthrop was both a loyalist and an advocate for a sharply divided social structure. Dionne even goes as far as to argue that Winthrop might be regarded, in part, as "socialistic" and sharing a communitarian spirit with the likes of Bruce Springsteen (*Divided* 77; "Battle" n.p.). Rather than contest it, Dionne ultimately reaffirms the essentialized qualities of settled Puritanism by working to situate his politics closer to its mythic center.

All US presidents and presidential candidates who reintroduce Winthrop to the public memory, however, participate in a kind of illusory essence-making, one that postwar American literature contests in highly nuanced ways. Whether careless or contrived, Reagan's speeches nevertheless harness history's power in a way not sanctioned by the professional historian's discipline. The slippage from "upon" to "on," the transposition of Winthrop from Puritan to Pilgrim, the transformation of a project founded on exclusivity into one of "freedom," making the whole thing shine: these are fictions. Reagan's misrepresentations disguise their status as fiction whereas Whitehead's caustic jokes fictionalize openly. Reagan utilizes the novelist's tactic of opportunistic appropriation, harnessing the originary force inherent in America's New English foundations to suit his own needs. Setting aside questions of ethical propriety, Reagan's revised Puritanism fits a larger pattern of fictional reconsiderations of the reformed Christianity that looms large in the story of America. Colson Whitehead balks at such moves, subtly but scathingly pointing out that Winthrop's assumption of natural class difference contradicts the "self-evident" truth—"that all men are created equal"—articulated in the very Declaration of Independence that Reagan touted so heartily in 1974.

In creating his ideal Puritan, Auster's Stillman makes Henry Dark English by birth. He is not born in Massachusetts, and Stillman does not make an

alternate vision of a global Puritan possible (indeed, he might have come from Dutch communities that welcomed the English before the famed *Mayflower* voyage). Thus while *City of Glass* does not explicitly engage with ethnic and race relations in the United States, as does Whitehead's *Apex*, it does reaffirm how the Puritan myth obscures American Indian, Jewish, Catholic, black African, and Spanish contributions to the US political-identity landscape. Auster's first American is an Englishman, just as the settled discourse about Puritan origins maintains. Stillman's justification in an invented past exaggerates how Americans often use the Puritan myth, but does so only to a degree greater than nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples of it.

Sylvia Söderlind explains, in a brilliant essay linking Auster's obsession with Humpty Dumpty to Charles I's execution and England's Puritan interregnum, that Quinn's walk from the World Trade Center to the UN serves as an allegory for Stillman's teleological history. The Towers, in her reading, represent the Tower of Babel; the United Nations building, on the other hand, stands in for a space of reunified language. "In other words," she writes, "Quinn walks a Puritan walk from type to anti-type, from the Old Testament's punishment of human hubris to its redemption in the New Testament" (7). She argues compellingly that Auster's novel "links New York to the most hubristic gesture of all in the [American] national allegory: the Puritans' exceptionalist claim to building the New Jerusalem in America" (7–8). Not only does this move call attention to the renewed Reaganesque investment in "Puritanism," it also reminds us how the figure of the Puritan positions Anglo-American Protestants closest in succession to their god, in which America—at least monetarily—trusts.

Despite all the evidence by the end of the novel that no plot really exists for Quinn to unearth, he maintains a commitment to the idea that there is some purpose for him in the Stillmans' lives. Trying to make a case where there is none leads Quinn to chase the shadows of the young Stillman's paternal fears and erases him from a real existence. Yet the outcome of Stillman's quest offers a potential resolution to the Puritan paradox: searching for the father that was never doing what the child assumed, like searching for the Puritans in history, reveals to his readers that he was responding to his own projections, long after someone else planted the seed of meaning in his mind.

The multivalent pull on the meaning of Winthrop's legacy underscores how narratives about origins function also as narratives about essences; by modifying the story of where America comes from, Reagan can then make an important claim about who Americans are (as the metaphor goes) "at base." I see

Colson Whitehead's novel as an honorable, if less effective, attempt to counterbalance Reagan's simplification of the past. Reagan's version of Winthrop, not surprisingly, neglects to indicate that Winthrop's unpopularity in his own time stemmed from levying fairly high taxes. Kennedy, on the other hand, notes something of Winthrop's present left out in Reagan's telling: the Massachusetts colony was shaped by the forces of "terror without and disorder within." Not much has changed on that front. Appearance and chaos, the knowable and the factitious—these are the substrate of the origins of America.

City of Glass, notably, concludes with two remarkable twists. In one, a first-person narrator slowly reveals himself as the "author" of the text presented to the reader. Like the hands that penned Winthrop's "Model," he remains unidentified and his relationship to the story poorly defined. In another, the Quinn character literally collapses into his own attempts at self-representation: all that remains of his self can be found in a red notebook that contains his remarks, first on the "case," then (as abstract ruminations) on the beauty of life. His final words—and of course they are final, since they are framed by the Paul Austers both inside and writing the novel—remain: "What happens when there are no more pages in this red notebook?" (Auster 200). Just as Quinn lives only in the pages of the red notebook, which itself exists only in the pages of a book, so too do the Puritan origins of modern America exist as a story within other stories, told less by the subjects of the narrative than by their descendants. Put down in type first set by Cotton Mather, and proliferated in the discourses that surround the "figure of that first ancestor" (Hawthorne, *SL* 8), we can only wonder: what if we stop thinking of the Puritans as a singular entity, and treat that past like the palimpsest of discordant voices the historical register records? Or, better still, what happens if we stop writing about "The Puritans" altogether? In concluding this book, I suggest that Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* shows just how, and to what effect, such a future of Puritan studies can be.

7

AMERICA BEFORE PURITANISM

OR, TONI MORRISON'S DECENTERED ENGLISH ORIGIN

For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world. Only within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women.

—Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"

The story John Winthrop set upon America's discursive hill has grown to proportions he could not have imagined; it has taken a shape he surely did not intend; and it continues to exert a tremendous influence in the service of a small but powerful elite. What unites the preceding chapters is the reluctant acknowledgment that the Puritan myth operates centrally in the definition of Americanness. To change predominant conversations about Americanness, then, we need to reconstruct both the content and forms through which the Puritan myth circulates.

Again, my thinking here has been shaped by Tracy Fessenden's astute observation that the putatively "Puritan" interpretation of American culture has a number of effects on notions of modern American secularism. She shows how New English Christians continue to influence the way would-be secular Americans read texts, making contemporary reading practices an exercise in Protestant thinking. Secularism, then, did not displace Protestantism; rather, Protestantism determined the shape of the secular. Fessenden also implies that the individualism descended from a distinctively Calvinist mindset privileges a self comprised primarily of interiority, rather than an identity that is a product of interactions with the surrounding community.

Jenny Franchot follows this forged "secularism" into the domain of history. "Combined with Scripture into a single progressive sacred text," she

explains, "*history* as a conventional term of antebellum Protestant periodical prose enjoyed the redemptive power of a language close to 'nature' and hence divorced from the contaminations of culture" (11). If the predominant discourses in the United States are ever to unsettle the Puritan origin myth and its belief system, national conversations need to move not past, but prior to, the collapsing of New English dynamism into simple "Puritanism." We must acknowledge Prostestantism's acculturation in the face of its apparent naturalness. America's literatures must do more than point out the hypocrisies inherent in the Puritan myth (as Gaddis and Vonnegut tried to do). And while laudable, reinvesting the "Puritan" signifier and its forms with more inclusive content (as I argue that Vonnegut, Pynchon, Robinson, Auster, and Whitehead do) only partly unsettles colonial New England's mythologized coherence. A more effective move, I contend, is figured in Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, which returns to a borderlands era of colonial American history to offer the ensuing nation a borderlands origin. Before firm lines were drawn around what we now call US states, between "American" genres of writing, between races of people as such, and even between "individual" and community, Morrison renders America as a place that situated the *pluribus* first in priority before the *unum*, as in the famed phrase's sequencing.

Just over two decades after publishing *Beloved* (1987), Nobel laureate Toni Morrison released a second neo-slave narrative strikingly redolent of the novel that solidified her place in the pantheon of America's great authors. *A Mercy* (2008) also narrates the decline of comparatively humane slave conditions into dispassionate cruelty; its plot traces a similarly fraught relationship between a nonwhite woman pushed to the edges of her society and a man of African descent reluctant to accept her; its characters are collaterally damaged by an intranational conflict (Bacon's Rebellion); and it too features a haunted house. Indeed, like *Beloved*'s 124 Bluestone, *A Mercy*'s Vaark house also has two stories.

Rich in suggestive imagery and clever punning, *A Mercy* produces a space abounding with potential connections and therefore limitless in its interpretive possibilities. I will first explore Florens's letter as a fictional precursor to the slave narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—and how this formal choice resonates with *Beloved*'s neo-slave narrative aspects. Then I will turn to Jacob Vaark's illusory moral high ground, which exposes the hypocrisy of profiting from slavery's evils. Finally, I will revisit the form of Rebekka's conversion experience, and how radical Reformation Christianity (at the time

known as Puritanism) produced a wary and divided America—a view from the colonial frontier that contrasts directly with folk histories placing Plymouth Plantation and the Massachusetts Bay Colony at the center of America's origins.

Given that *Beloved* won a Pulitzer Prize and was named by the *New York Times Book Review* as the best novel published between 1975–2000, some critics were surprised and disappointed by Morrison's return to the neo-slave narrative form. While praising its lyrical prose, many condemned its story as underdeveloped and inferior to its heartrending predecessor. Yet despite what John Updike and others seem to suggest (Waegner 111–12, Updike n.p.), *A Mercy* is much more than a return to the site of a previous triumph. Rather, it works with *Beloved* to frame transatlantic history's most shameful chapter. Both books also explore the historical substrate for contemporary American race relations; but while *Beloved* deals with the life and afterlife of institutionalized race-based chattel slavery, *A Mercy* focuses on the binding of slavery to nascent categories of racial difference in the American colonies. Echoing Jared Hickman's description of global modernity's dialogical development, it also traces the emergence of a new Western worldview generated by New English contact with indigenous Americans and African slaves. In so doing, it restores the heterogeneity of "Puritanism" itself, eschewing the term (due to its anachronism) in favor of often disorienting labels like "Separatist" and "Anabaptist," which are far less familiar in popular representations of English and Dutch colonial spaces in the northeastern United States. Imagining the voice of a non-English slave woman who lived before the production both of race and of "the Puritans" as discursively monist, Morrison models what may be the future of New England studies, a future in which precisely deployed terminology reveals New England as one of many origins of modern America, and one out of which many different notions of Americanness can radiate.

Set in postwar Ohio, on a border that separated the free North from the slave South, *Beloved* shows how the horrors of slavery were not exterminated with Emancipation and the Thirteenth Amendment. Speaking to its mid-1980s audience, it reminded Americans that slavery's "traumatic and continued effects on Americans, both black and white, have not been dealt with" (Vint 242). In contrast with *A Mercy*, *Beloved*'s narrator largely dwells outside the narrative action, closely following several characters but largely focalized by the mind of its protagonist, Sethe. *A Mercy* similarly stresses the continued influence of slavery on contemporary America. It details multiple intertwined narratives from more than one perspective to underscore the fact that in early New England all

categories of persons were potentially subject to enslavement.

The majority of the latter novel follows the apparently Afro-Portuguese slave Florens, who narrates her experience to an initially undefined addressee simply called "you." Florens's narration constitutes a distinct narrative arc within a larger, complex narrative framework that delineates the production of modern notions of race within New World chattel slavery.[1] Though it would be misleading to treat Florens's story as wholly discrete within the larger framework of *A Mercy*, its distinctive narrative elements contain a great deal of the novel's richness. Foremost among its characteristics is that Florens self-consciously writes her story; moreover, she does so on the inside walls of her master's abandoned and incomplete mansion. These elements, combined with its 1690 setting—a time well before any other "black" New World inhabitant is known to have written or published any work—make Florens's narrative not only distinct within *A Mercy*, but indeed unique among neo-slave narratives.

The rendering of a female slave's experience in her own writing marks a sharp contrast between *A Mercy* and *Beloved*, and marks a significant move within Morrison's career. Building on and responding to Madhu Dubey's research on *Beloved*, I here argue that *A Mercy* offers a dramatically different take on the neo-slave narrative from its predecessor, with a notably different relationship between narrative form and audience reception. *Beloved*, for its part, works more on the form of the novel itself in order to appeal to a (primarily) black audience that Morrison found underserved by then-contemporary conversations about slavery; *A Mercy*, on the other hand, seeks more to situate readers within a racialized subject position that highlights each reader's complicity in the binary logic that legitimizes an illusory essential difference between the races. By adopting a self-reflexive epistolary form in many of its sections, *A Mercy* not only shows how discourses about colonial America transform a young person of an as-yet unracialized lineage into a "black" woman who is thus enslaved for life, but it also implicates the novel's audience in the epistemological systems making her so. *A Mercy* also shows how wide-ranging American presumptions about liberty, ownership, and self-conception tie directly back to New English theology: with Morrison's hindsight, modern America's assumed individualism and racialized distinctions reveal their fully contingent nature.

In retaining its protagonist's first-person patois and in enabling Morrison to interrogate, rather than presume, the inherent value of "freedom" as defined by Western notions of subjectivity, *A Mercy*'s slave narrative avant la lettre functions to displace a mythical monism from the center of the American originary

moment to the periphery of an alternate, plural, multicultural center—the Vaark farm. The novel also reintroduces dynamism into the fixed ideas of place conditioned by present geopolitical arrangements. Instead, *A Mercy* highlights the colonial New World's unsettled flux, a sense of colonial space that is far more accurate to the reality of that period than are our contemporary understandings of how boundaries are drawn on the North American continent. This then permits Morrison to reenergize configurations of America's beginnings that *could have developed* instead of what eventually became fixed in Manifest Destiny and notions of American exceptionalism. *A Mercy* defamiliarizes generic New English narratives to highlight its contingent, not necessary, emplacement at the center of America's origin myths. Moreover, by writing in the present tense, Florens makes her story an immediate experience, revealing not just how the groundwork laid in 1690s discourse shapes our perceptions of America to this day, but also offering a program of thinking that reintroduces dispersal into the centripetal historicism too often at work in Puritan studies.

THE FORM OF *BELOVED*

Beloved blends conventions of popular nineteenth-century novels in English with contemporary formal experimentalism to resist, as Morrison herself claims, the effects that writing has historically exerted on the operations of race in the United States. The novel complements domestic sympatheticism with the Gothic's proto-Freudian "Uncanny" in order to document the troubled life of a freed slave community in Ohio; *Beloved*'s most "experimental" section fragments its narrative in order to conflate Beloved's ghostly transition between life and death with the horrors of the Middle Passage. Thus *Beloved* partly works against the tradition it inherits—primarily, the slave narrative grounded in Western forms of "realistic" representation—in order to write what otherwise is unwritable. Arlene R. Keizer argues that this was an important move at the time of its writing, since Morrison felt that "slavery wasn't in . . . [African American] literature at all" (Morrison, qtd. in Keizer 22) during her formative years. *Beloved*'s formal strategies also allowed her to write in a mode more familiar with, and reflective of, "Africanist" aesthetics and values that Morrison saw as incompatible with the tradition of American realistic fiction (Dubey 194).

Reading *Beloved*, Dubey identifies Morrison's frustration with being unable to fully identify as American, due to segregated America's incomplete embrace of Morrison's childhood self and of all other black Americans. Morrison admits to viewing normative America as something other than herself; she regards the

idea of a singular American "public" dangerously reductive in its singularity (Dubey 192). In response to the absorption of the Africanist idioms of black music into mainstream Euro-American culture, *Beloved* works to make a more specifically black novel, rooted in conventions outside "traditional novelistic or readerly" sources of its time (Morrison, qtd. in Dubey 192). Both novels emphasize houses with two stories, punningly suggesting the palimpsestic nature of American national formation, despite popular America's apparent preference for singular narratives.

While Dubey recognizes the pastiche elements at work in Morrison's earlier realist novels, she shows how *Beloved* produces an "unmediated fusion with an African past" (193) by blending oral literature and supernatural elements into the novel's more conventional form, which in part "indexes an already given cultural heritage" and "animates a pre-modern and anti-modern form of knowledge grounded in faith rather than reason and testifies to a shared structure of communal beliefs" (194).[2] Such blending understands "magic" as operating both literally and figuratively within the story; this cannot assure a solely black readership but nevertheless "is meant to affiliate us with black folk modes of knowing and to detach us from the literary frame of reference that Morrison repeatedly denounces in essays and interviews" (Dubey 194). Dubey also tracks how *Beloved* "refuses the assumption, central to the slave narratives, that print literacy is the most effective means of demonstrating the humanity of the slave" (195): here she cites Morrison's frustration about how the interior lives of slaves were too often neglected in slave narratives on the grounds that the narratives would appear too subjective.

Indeed, Lydia Maria Child cautions that some elements of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* might appear "more Romantic than fiction" (747); this fear perhaps partly explains why Child must editorially intervene. Without the endorsement of a white interlocutor to ground the veracity of the narrative, Jacobs's story might be too easily dismissed by its intended audience as a mendacious utterance by a member of an already (in her time) morally suspect race. In the case of *A Mercy*, Englishness mediates Florens's narrative to a lesser extent than in published narratives, though the force of a nascent whiteness manifests in Florens's accented English. Scratched onto the interior walls of the Vaark mansion, Florens's words may be her own, unmolested by white editorial interference, but they are also entirely obscured from the world, perhaps to be destroyed in fire, as the novel's conclusion suggests. As Beloved embodies a connection to the African past for Sethe, Vaark's mansion in *A Mercy* makes

physically real the discursive structures that both prefigure (in containing) and exclude (by obscuring) black voices in New World print discourse.

I contend *A Mercy* goes a step further than *Beloved* in appealing to a black audience, by explicitly positing Blacksmith and then Florens as addressees of diegetically present narrators whose intended audiences are conspicuously absent. That is, they are messages addressed to a "you" who remains undefined for most of the narrative. This device allows Vaark's house—itself an important symbol I will unpack later—to serve as a medium through which *A Mercy* locates its readership in a singular, black male position in its fictional discourse, forcing readerly identification with a character who has too easily accepted Euro-normative notions of metonymic selfhood in the terrain of the New World.[3] *A Mercy* then concludes by staging its reader as Florens herself, as we hear of her mother's own best attempts to make a better life for her daughter in the colonial North.

A MERCY'S TOOLS

The first eleven of *A Mercy*'s twelve sections alternate between an ongoing letter and third-person narratives of the people who live and work on the Anglo-Dutch Jacob Vaark's farm. The third-person sections give all of the main characters' backstories, providing clearer context for Florens's mission. Jacob's section—the novel's second—offers a highly self-serving account of how he acquires Florens in 1682, to settle a debt incurred when he loaned money to the Portuguese-Catholic D'Ortega. Vaark initially refuses the human property as restitution of the debts owed him by the slave trader: Vaark not only owns more slaves than he needs, but he also clearly wants to maintain an illusory distance between his rum business and human trafficking. Ultimately Vaark agrees to the deal only with the high-minded sense that he is "rescuing" an eight-year-old girl from D'Ortega's cruelty. The third-person narration ironically undermines his merciful act by remarking on the "faint trace of coon's blood" (35) staining his hands.

Vaark sees himself as morally above the slave trade, even though *A Mercy* begins at a moment when capital blurs the lines between involvement in and exemption from the buying and selling of human lives. From the start, it is clear his loans fund the disaster that figuratively sinks D'Ortega's fortune and literally sinks a ship full of human cargo off the shores of Maryland. Yet Vaark sees only the artificiality of European aristocracy in the New World context, realizing that the illusion of gentility often obscures the deficient character (and

even resources) of the image-makers; he does not recognize his increasing complicity in the system that stripped the rights and dignities from African people in the New World based upon their skin color. Partly in anger and partly from hubris, Jacob commissions a home loosely modeled on D'Ortega's grandiose displays of an inherited fortune. His desires thus relocate Old World *cum* "Old South" aristocracy in a northern New World caste system, one that both relies upon and ignores race-based slavery to construct a narrative of America as a place where anyone is free to pursue his own economic self-interest. Vaark sells rum as both the means to, and the end of, his sense of accomplishment: like Gaddis and Vonnegut, Morrison also diagnoses the breakdown of virtue ethics in capitalist systems.

On one of his business trips, Jacob contracts smallpox and dies, leaving behind his wife, Rebekka, along with the slaves she now owns: the American Indian woman, Lina; Sorrow, of African descent; and Florens. Two white indentured servants from a neighboring homestead, Will and Scully, visit the women regularly. In the spring of 1690, Rebekka falls desperately ill with smallpox. She believes a certain blacksmith, once hired by Vaark to build the fence surrounding his mansion, can heal her, so she sends Florens off to retrieve him. When the blacksmith does arrive, Rebekka's body heals, though it seems her soul has departed this world in a persistent bent toward the heavenly.

Rebekka's confidence in Florens derives from her knowledge of the young slave's love for the free black craftsman, whom she calls Blacksmith. When she arrives at his home, however, Florens learns that the blacksmith has adopted a young boy named Malaik. She and Malaik grow mutually suspicious, and each views the other as a threat to their desired bond with the empowered male artisan. Tensions escalate and, while trying to quiet the younger boy's crying, Florens inadvertently breaks his arm. When Blacksmith sees what she has done, he immediately rebukes her, despite Florens's professed devotion to him. He derides her for being "wild" and a willful, willing slave (141).

Rebekka's communion with her slaves devolves when she adopts the theology of the Separatists neighboring her farm, and the utopian character of the Vaark farm cedes to the commonplace evils of colonial American slavery as she prioritizes a hoped-for bond with a transcendent God over the actual ties she shares with her immediate community. The group of slaves (in which one might include Rebekka, given that she was effectively sold into marriage with Vaark) slowly descends from a comparatively healthy equilibrium to a state of fragmented misery, all within the grounds of the plantation house that marks the

landscape as a site of increasingly naturalized racial oppression.[4]

Returning to the Vaark plantation, Florens loses her shoes—a characteristic symbol of her softness and vulnerability—as well as the letter given her by Rebekka that both asserted her owned status and "protected" her from others who might steal her into their own slavery. Unbeknownst to the remnants of the Vaark "community," she takes up residence in the incomplete mansion. Working by night, she scratches her self-narrative into the walls, floor, and ceiling of an empty monument to capitalist hubris; to do so, she writes not with a pen, but a nail. The master's tools inscribe, and the master's house records, her transformation from impassioned lover to impervious isolate.

The novel's final section is also told in the first person, but this time from the perspective of Florens's mother; it explains how she insisted that Vaark take Florens instead of herself to protect her daughter from the sexual violence of D'Ortega's farm. This detail, along with many others, is fashioned as a message to Florens—who, in this final section, is also addressed as "you." The woman Florens calls "a minha mãe" (Portuguese for "my mother") recounts, in terse but evocative language, tensions between rival African societies. The conflict leads to her capture and transfer across the Atlantic, where she is raped and impregnated. When Vaark arrives to settle his debts with D'Ortega, Florens's mother notes her daughter's coming puberty and implores Jacob to take her daughter rather than herself, in order to spare the young girl from the traumas the mother experienced. Like Florens's letter to the blacksmith, however, the narrative never reaches its intended audience, and Florens misreads her mother's simple act of mercy as abandoning her in favor of protecting her younger brother. Ending the book where the novel's plot begins, then, encourages a rereading for intentions and meanings beyond the immediately apparent. As I will discuss later, some of the more fruitful sites of interpretation reside in the syntax of Florens's prose.

A (PRE)HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Beloved redounds to the Cold War era's rich body of novels, films, and television miniseries representing different aspects of slave life in North America. While these works serve dramatically different aims and draw from a diverse array of aesthetic traditions, they tend to share a common temporal focus; before the publication of *A Mercy*, few if any historical fictions of slavery reached back to the period preceding 1760, the year that saw the publication of *A Narrative of the Most Uncommon Sufferings and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A*

Negro Man and the first of Jupiter Hammon's (no relation) and Phillis Wheatley's poems, works generally recognized as the first published by black writers in North America. *A Mercy*'s setting precedes the earliest work by black writers in Euro-American New World literary history, allowing Morrison to imagine a slave's writerly voice before a tradition of black Atlantic publishing—arguably inspired by the Great Awakening (Carretta 13)—functionally predetermined what African writing in English could and should do. Not surprisingly, these narratives often reinforce specific precepts of Protestant and Euronormative thinking that quickly ossify into the core of American identity, at the center of which lies a Western idea of the freedom-loving individual. Hence Blyden Jackson calls the earliest period of black New World slave writing "The Age of Apprenticeship." The practice to which these writers were apprenticed, then, warrants a brief review.

At present, consensus credits Lucy Terry with pride of first place for black writers in American literary history. But since her 1746 poem "Bars Fight" was not published until 1855, it had little impact on a literary audience beyond her locale of Deerfield, Massachusetts. Briton Hammon, whose narrative was printed in England in 1760, is therefore regarded as the first published black New World writer in English. Surprisingly, neither "first" text demonstrates an overt engagement with questions of color or race: the speaker in Terry's poem sounds like the English versifiers of her day. Of Terry's poem, Jackson claims it "is not only 'white.' It is also English" (32). Similarly, Hammon's race is only recognizable by his autobiography's title. But "black" voices had been "speaking" in anglophone letters for some time, and to a noteworthy extent, long before black writers ever scripted their words. White writers had often ventriloquized black characters in print to fuel the debate about confining diasporic Africans in slavery (Bruce 28).

As multiple scholars have shown, the discursive field into which writers like Briton Hammon, Jupiter Hammon, Phillis Wheatley, James Albert (Ukawsaw Gronniosaw), and others first published was highly preconditioned by a long historical, philosophical, and religious history in which black descendants of Africa were rarely able to claim a human voice. These frustrating conditions are documented extensively elsewhere: Henry Louis Gates Jr. convincingly argues "Black people . . . had to represent themselves as 'speaking subjects' before they could even begin to destroy their status as objects, or commodities, within Western culture. In addition to all of the myriad reasons for which human beings write books, this particular reason seems to have been paramount for

the black slave" (129). Gates identifies two critical elements that underpin early slave narratives—their "I was born" beginnings and the prevalence of the "trope of the talking book." The latter element is particularly important, since it demonstrates that black literacy was a precondition for entering into the discourse of slavery. The origin of this prerequisite is quite simple: given European humanism's emphasis on the relationship between reason and the essence of human being, and given the growing emphasis on the relationship between writing and the demonstration of the basic capacity to reason, the abilities to read and write were the sine qua non of black slaves' claims to having a human voice. Subsequent to Gates, Dickson D. Bruce shows how early slave narratives quickly developed recognizable and consistent generic qualities, qualities which demonstrate the warping force that publishing expectations of the eighteenth century exerted on what constituted black slaves' contributions to the literature of the emerging America.

Bruce tracks the profound influence of Christian conversion on the acceptability of the black voice in the public sphere. Despite evidence that very few slaves in the eighteenth century have been shown to claim Christian conversion, legal maneuverings in the period led to serious questions about how patterns of Christian conversion might substantiate lawsuits for freedom. Although the force of these legal claims quickly waned as colonial legislation hedged against them, early black New World writing seemed to garner its strongest credibility by fitting into the established patterns of evangelical conversion narratives (35–38). Carretta sees Christianity as an even stronger motivating (and thus shaping) force than race in the production of early writing by people of African descent. Owing to English Protestantism's widespread insistence on the doctrine of *sola scriptura* and the requirement for individual reading of the Bible, evangelical efforts to effect conversions throughout the British Empire led to concomitant literacy drives. Moreover, Calvinist-inflected doctrines of salvation that placed grace before works effectively led converts to believe their actions served as indications, rather than causes, of Christian salvation. Hence spiritual autobiography and journal-keeping were often outward and visible records of partially assured inward and spiritual grace. "Consequently," Carretta claims, "virtually all the early publications in prose by people of African descent took the form of spiritual autobiographies that trace the transition from pagan beliefs to the Christianity shared with the authors' British and colonial readers" (13).

Before Patricia Caldwell's definitive study of the New England conversion narrative, Edmund S. Morgan identified what he called "the morphology

of conversion" (*Visible Saints* 66) as a series of rhetorical moves that served as evidence of election to salvation and which constituted a prerequisite for full communion in early New English Congregationalist churches. These moves function as a kind of insider code, the likes of which would most certainly assure much of a Calvinist readership of an individual's likely inclusion among the elect. The pattern of Calvinist conversion shows up in many of the most significant early slave narratives, and is perhaps most obviously manifest in Equiano, parts of whose *Interesting Narrative* might seem right at home in Cotton Mather's repository of conversion narratives in the *Magnalia Christi Americana*. While the fact that Equiano's conversion takes place in England—not in the Americas—fascinates for certain ideological reasons, the steps of conversion are readily apparent to the informed reader, and demonstrate the clear sense that Equiano needs to prove the thoroughness of his Christian status in terms convincing to a Christian readership.

Equiano also leans heavily on other Euro-American conventions: as Bruce claims, his writing displays three basic components of early slave writing. First, Equiano posits an idyllic native Africa, even going as far as to contrast the benevolent African practice of slavery against the barbarous American institution. Second, his extended account of his life stresses a burning desire for freedom. Finally, his narrative suggests that the institution of slavery inevitably leads to the moral corruption of whites on American soil.

Scholars agree on consistencies existing within the tradition of black Atlantic slave writing well beyond Equiano. In his preface to the paperback edition of *Oxherding Tale*, critic and novelist Charles Johnson identifies "the slave narrative, one of the oldest literary forms indigenous to the American experience," which "provided the basis for the black novel and tradition of autobiography." He was surprised to learn it "was in fact indebted to an older form, the Puritan narrative . . . and *that* form . . . had ancestral roots stretching as far back as Augustine's *Confessions*" (xiv). Johnson later claims, within the novel proper, that "as a general *form*," the authentic narrative of an escaped slave "is related, as distant cousins are related, to the Puritan Narrative, a document written specifically by a member of a religious American community to show—as testimony—that he has accepted Christ. Here the narrative is from sin to salvation; it is only with slight variation that the narrative *oomph* becomes in the work of a Douglass, a progress from slavery to freedom. In point of fact, the movements in the Slave Narrative from slavery (sin) to freedom (salvation) are identical to those of the Puritan Narrative. . . . No form, I should note, *loses* its ancestry;

rather, these meanings accumulate in layers of tissue as the form evolves" (118–19). Similarly, my point is not to label early slave writing in English formulaic; rather, I wish to highlight that the discursive space open to nonwhite writers was decidedly narrow. Its narrowness manifested in a highly refined set of expectations and demands placed upon texts that would reach press and distribution in colonial America and the early United States. To a high degree, what was publishable as "African American" writing had to meet highly specific criteria, and their claims to human identity came prepackaged as claims to European humanist identity.

IMAGINING A LITERATURE BEFORE ITS HISTORY

The strictures imposed on early Africanist self-expression are common features in contemporary revisionist fictions. As Ashraf H. A. Rushdy describes, "in the case of oppositional works like Neo-slave narratives, authors do not strive for canonization by situating their texts in relation to a canonized text, but rather skeptically query the very process of canonicity and the appropriative gestures involved in that process; and they do so by reflecting on the social origins of the problematic they define and circumscribe" (*Neo-slave* 14). Much of *Beloved* defies the generic prescriptions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave writing. Not only is it narrated in the third person; it also primarily takes place in the postbellum American North. The narrator remarks on the Ohio River—the clear line of demarcation between the free North and the enslaved South—with great frequency. By contrast, *A Mercy*'s physical setting is impossible to place on a modern American map. While some have concluded that the narrative takes place in upstate New York, I contend that such claims miss the point of the novel's insistently fluid New World.

The critical confusion surrounding *A Mercy*'s setting is understandable, owing to the novel's oblique set of signs establishing place. One of Vaark's early, endearing qualities is his recognition of American Indian ownership of the land he traverses. This works to disorient a modern reader, who is unlikely to know where the Abenaki, Lenape, and Powhatan peoples once lived.[5] Certain Dutch place-names (Fort Orange, Niuew Amsterdam; Wiltwyck [13]) have led critics to conclude that the novel is set in the present-day Hudson Valley. For example, Maxine Montgomery asserts the Vaark farm is in "Upstate New York" (631). This kind of anachronistic language maps onto the past the very orientation from the present that *A Mercy* works to unseat.

Yes, since Vaark has Dutch ancestry, and since he is said to have inherited a

"patroonship"—language suggesting Dutch colonization of the land—it might be considered reasonable that his farm is somewhere east of today's Albany, New York. Then again, one must consider that Florens travels under the imprimatur of Rebekka Vaark, who identifies her home in 1690 as "Milton." In 1690, there was a Milton in Massachusetts but none in New York (although today we find both a town and a hamlet in the Hudson region of New York with that name). In addition, Florens carries the note attesting to her status as Vaark property "westward on the Abenaki trail" (46), which would probably send her through modern Vermont or northeast New York, should one follow Jacob Vaark in ascribing place to the peoples who occupied it. Furthermore, Florens's westward trek sends her through the Ealings' town as it suffers an identifiably English witch-crisis, bearing all the signs of Salem's panic two years to come. Finally, Rebekka herself admits that she lives in a "new England" (5), not "New York," even though that colony was so named by 1664.

I do not mean here to claim the novel takes place in present-day Milton, Massachusetts—to do so would also contradict the evident purpose of rendering a New World that predates our contemporary sense of its arrangement. Instead, I think we are supposed to recall the dynamisms of place characterizing 1690. The artificiality of geopolitical boundaries reverberated with the radical instability of the colonies. For this reason, I contend *A Mercy* is most likely set west of the Massachusetts Bay Company's settlements, and east of former Dutch strongholds, on a contested border between the New York and Massachusetts colonies which was not fixed until 1773.

Jacob proudly declaims his efforts to make "a place out of no place" (12), and it is imperative we take him at his word. Indeed, John Milton's epic otherworldly landscape may be seen as more apt a setting than any real-world conception of modern America. This phrase, "no place," is Utopia. Morrison's pun on More's famous ideal underscores *A Mercy*'s commitment (like Pynchon's) to imagining America in the subjunctive—a space that could have been, but did not become. Leaving the space of *A Mercy* underdefined resists the desire to retroactively apply modern borders onto a space that was, at the time, configured differently; so, too, should we resist shaping Florens's sense of her self and her narrative through frameworks developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since Morrison admits the inevitability (though not the naturalness) of slavery,[6] *A Mercy* directs its attention less to the problem of slavery as such than to how New World slavery essentialized blackness as difference, as well as the ways blackness became mobilized in the race-based caste system

persisting into the present. Morrison has long contended that, as a unique tradition, American literature relies on the construction of blackness as difference to a normative, individualist, invisible whiteness (Morrison, *Playing* 5–6); *A Mercy* details the historical development of what she sees as an originally American notion. This explains, in part, her eschewing the term "Puritan"—with its now venerable and apparently positivist (as opposed to apophatic) connotations—for other words like "Anabaptist" and "Separatist," which rely on negative reference points for coherence.

Already, Valerie Babb's criticism, alongside readily available interviews with Morrison, has established how *A Mercy* documents an America wherein slavery existed prior to the de jure distinction of white people from black people.[7] What interests me is how Morrison imagines a slave narrative that predates our historically conditioned ideas about both "race" and what slave writing can do. In interviews, Morrison insists that American "individualism," a notion so prized in the infancy of American literature, requires an external framework lest it should dissolve (Norris n.p.). The fiction lived by the slaves on the Vaark farm is that it can exist without a master—Jacob forces the community into coherence, despite the farm's orderly operation during his many absences. When he dies, Rebekka could have freed her slaves, to live with them as free equals, since she was effectively living as an equal subject to Jacob in marriage. To the contrary, her relationships dissolve: freed herself, Rebekka denies freedom to her former friends. Morrison thereby questions the assumption that "freedom" in and of itself, the substrate of modern American "individualism," is necessarily better than alternative conceptions of the self in society.

"Blacksmith," as Florens calls him, prefigures an American individualism that does not yet exist.[8] Hence Florens is confused by his attitude—it is something she has never seen before. Vaark identifies the waning power of D'Ortega's aristocratic assumptions: the myth of his wealth rests on ancestral claims to higher social standing, rather than on actual capital holdings. Vaark's ability to break from that model could have led to many social formations: unfortunately, from the perspective of *A Mercy*, selfishness and superficiality lay the groundwork for a United States defined by exclusion and a concept of difference that highlights separation rather than fostering bonds of identification between selves. The blacksmith similarly rejects Florens not just because she breaks Malaik's arm, but also because he sees her foremost as a slave. This slavery—whether to Vaark or to the blacksmith's love—emphasizes her need for others, for a system larger than herself. Such needs are often elided or ignored when

Americanist ideologies conflate "freedom" and "individualism."

For Morrison, I contend, freedom more properly consists in persons opting in to the systems on which they rely, and resisting simple or mindless absorption into other such systems they choose not to see. Compare Jacob Vaark's claims to independence from the slave trade with his economic reality. Lorenzo Johnston Greene quite literally equates "the famous triangular slave trade" (24) with the rum trade, which was "vital to the slave trade as well as to New England's economy" (25). So even if we can overlook the fact that Vaark profits from lending money to the slave trader D'Ortega, and focus instead on his choosing to save the helpless Florens from the Portuguese plantation, we cannot ignore the simple fact that the house Vaark builds rests on the same foundation, slavery, as does D'Ortega's mansion. Vaark's claim that his "trade is goods and gold" (25) stands as hollow as the unfurnished home his rum-trade profits build.

This house is as important a symbol in the novel as are Florens's shoes, both being Western forms of external protection that both aid and hamper Florens's development.[9] Jacob intends the plantation house to be a record of his successes, of his rise from "orphan" to whatever kind of idyllic figure he imagines himself to be. Rebekka worries little about the vanity of the thing so long as it stands as a record more of what Jacob is doing (maintaining his homestead) than what he has done (profiteering off the rum trade). Building the house, however, kills the couple's only child that outlived infancy, the suggestively named five-year-old Patrician, who is kicked in the head by a workhorse. Building the house then becomes Vaark's apparent raison d'être; succumbing to illness, he orders his slaves to carry him to die within its walls, even though the glass had not yet been installed in its windows.

Like *Beloved*'s 124 Bluestone Road, Vaark's mansion is believed to be haunted. *Beloved*'s central house, however, is literally haunted by the ghost of the "crawling-already?" baby that Sethe kills rather than remit into slavery; her ghost later returns as Beloved.[10] Florens haunts Vaark's unoccupied homestead after being rejected by Blacksmith. Florens exploits the home, then, as a medium onto which she can inscribe her narrative. Again, this is a narrative that predates all known black "American" writing, and its medium is not paper (which would have been made from cloth at that time) but plaster. Moreover, her prose eschews the black/white binary of ink on paper, opting instead to leave indented marks that would retain the original color of the writing surface. Such a move then sidesteps the racializing effects that writing might have exerted on Florens's subject position.

Instead, the novel races "you." The addressee of Florens's narrative is suggestively underdetermined at the opening. As the narrative absorbs the reader's attention, the distance between the reading subject and the character to which the second-person pronoun refers remains deliberately obscured. The gaze of the seeing "eye/I" in her internally focalized narrative becomes displaced onto the reader, who is then raced and gendered as the novel reveals the status of the addressee and his role in the plot. Though it is obviously not the case that readers actually become black men, the novel has the uncanny effect of placing the reader in the position that judges and rejects Florens for her "blackness," her wildness, and her willingness to subject herself to others.

In the final chapter, "you" is reconfigured as Florens herself, as the addressee of "a minha mãe's" explanation of events. In a sudden move, the reader is displaced from the blacksmith's subject position to Florens's, and hears (as Florens) the palliative to Florens's "one sadness" that "all this time I cannot know what my mother is telling me" (161). Strikingly, "a minha mãe's" pattern of solecisms deviates from Florens's tendency to rely heavily on passive constructions, which makes Florens so often the object of her own sentences. This grammatical move highlights the problem of assuming the subject's discrete self-sufficiency; for while it suggests a kind of wholeness, it also diminishes agency within an utterance. Florens's mother, in contrast, consistently uses the plural first-person "we" to mean "us," as in the following example: "We increase in number or we decrease in number until maybe seven or ten times ten of *we* are driven into a holding pen" (165, emphasis added). Here, then, the group remains the subject—not the object—of the sentence, even as they are being removed from Africa to New World slavery. The group-as-subject gives a kind of syntactic power through translation; a minha mãe refers to herself as an "I" only when talking about her experiences as a slave. Otherwise, she sees herself as part of a larger we-subject.

Thus (and this is a point Morrison has made in multiple interviews), *A Mercy* demonstrates the illusory nature of Western early-capitalist independence and self-sufficiency. By and large, the novel foregrounds the multiplicity of connections in an increasingly interdependent world. It demonstrates the need for community in the well-being of others: from an Africanist perspective, the notion that an integral self relies on communion with a benevolent group for full personhood would not register as paradoxical so much as self-evident.[11] "You," then—mostly the blacksmith, but also by extension the reader—chooses to privilege his white neighbors' posture toward selfhood over

the community-oriented bent of his Africanist heritage. This much is evident by the manner in which he so easily conducts business with (and alongside) Jacob Vaark. His assimilation may be admirable in certain respects, but it indicates an easy assumption of Western values; it also places the blacksmith in a position to profit from Vaark's contemptible industry and complicates his own reactionary high-mindedness.

At the end of the novel Florens has strength and independence—but, for all that, she is alone. Among her final words, she writes "I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last" (189). Florens's statement of self exceeds singular meaning: "No ruth, my love" alone denies pity while also evoking the biblical Book of Ruth, a story about belonging, rejection, and bare feet. But I find the final three sentences of greatest interest; she concludes her narrative with a highly ambivalent assertion. While she may be rejecting her sense of self as slave by asserting that she belongs to the latter category, "free," the unclear statement also affords a reading that she is both slave *and* free but, above all else, she endures. To "become wilderness," however, puts her outside the community of humankind; her story—and thus her self—will forever fold in on itself, only to be disseminated should it be destroyed by fire and scattered like ash across the landscape. Such immolation would, of course, render this self illegible.

The paradox wherein dissemination destroys a message seems less an indictment of her character than it is a critical questioning of the world she inhabits. Florens has been exiled to the margins of a decayed "community," the utopian quality of which was barely more than illusory. Yet the novel makes perfectly clear that Jacob's disappearance, and thus the displacement of his centrality, does not by itself lead to the corruption of the group. Especially in light of this essay's epigraph, consider Sorrow, whose fictional community with Twin dissolves in favor of the real, maternal bond with her child. She renames herself Complete. Rebekka, as Lorde avers, has an opportunity not to overlook, but to embrace, the multiplicity of womanhood within her farm's community; not to fill the void left by Vaark's absence but to improve it. This would involve replacing the hierarchical structure of difference within patriarchy with "the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences." This interdependence in turn could create a kind of "freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive *be* and the active *being*" (Lorde 111). Instead of reorienting her community with this valuation of differences, however, Rebekka turns to the poisonous community

surrounding her, whose radical Reformation Christian doctrines lead her to reject the immanent value of community over a desperate hope for transcendent redemption.

EXOTICIZING THE PURITANS

If the historiography of colonial American literature has unfortunately warped our sense of "black" American experiences in the New World, so too has it exaggerated the hegemony of so-called Puritans over the New English landscape. While some truth resides in the narratives of a Separatist ("Pilgrim") myth that a brave and intrepid group of nonconformists cohered behind a common cause to make the Plymouth colony a space for freedom of worship, this tale leaves out so many historical nuances as to render it effectively untrue. One must recall that the Pilgrims' colonial enterprise was in large measure an economic venture (funded by a group called the Merchant Adventurers), which these Separatists appropriated to their sectarian religious cause. So, too, were the later, nonseparating "Puritans" of the Massachusetts Bay Company funded by backers who quickly questioned the early Bostonians' motives and principled commitment to "liberty of conscience," codified language meaning residents in the Massachusetts Bay Colony were free to practice the dominant mode of Congregationalist Christianity (and little else). Yet Quakers and Anabaptists also made their way to the New World; so, too, did Anglicans, French Catholics, and less ardent Dutch Reformed Christians fill the landscape.

Rebekka's nearest neighbors are Anabaptists—who in the English lexicon would have been branded under the common slur, "puritan." As I established in the introduction, posterity in America would eventually conflate all puritanisms with Calvinism, but at the time, "puritan" was a derisive term used against the various theologies that advocated more stringent reform than was effected by the switch from Catholicism to Anglicanism. Hence Morrison's aptly choosing the term "Separatist." Not all puritanisms advocated breaking away from the Anglican Church. Those commonly called the Puritans were zealous nonconformists who nevertheless generally refused to embrace a Separatist stance: their goal in cultivating the "city upon a hill" was to show Anglicans the best way to be Christian, not leave them to ruin. Unlike the normative New England "Puritans," Anabaptists required a confession of faith prior to the sacrament of baptism. In *A Mercy* this commitment to adult baptism prevented the five-year-old Patrician from being baptized before her death, and led Rebekka to reject communion with them while Jacob remained alive. Morrison's sensitivity to

the religious politics of the time signifies in at least two compelling ways: not only does *A Mercy* complicate America's "Puritan" tradition by undermining reductive portrayals of New World colonial Britain in the North as monolithically nonseparating Calvinist Congregationalist, but it also highlights Rebekka choosing a commitment to her self as a white person over a commitment to the group of other women.

Susan Strehle's "I Am a Thing Apart" helpfully explores how Morrison highlights the role of binaries in American exceptionalist thinking. In evaluating this phenomenon, though, she too readily excludes Presbyterians, Separatists, and Anabaptists from the English witch-hunters that she calls "Puritans." In fact, Morrison avoids the term "Puritan" altogether, leaving the (likely Congregationalist) beliefs of the widow Ealing's community unnamed. Strehle succumbs to using the retrodiction of "Puritan" for only one kind of New English Christianity, underscoring the ease with which contemporary scholarship accepts the distinction of "Puritan" from separatist Christianities.

The distinctions matter because, from the center of Florens's community—a group whose initial ideals and composite ethnic makeup reflect the colonial demographics of the New World in 1690—the reformed Christians at the margin of the farm appear overzealous to the point of being poisonous. The moralism of the Anabaptists (whom Morrison sardonically also calls "Separatists") prompts Rebekka to strike Sorrow for urinating in plain view: in this gesture, the natural is made "immoral," and immorality prompts brutal oppression. Later, Rebekka's acceptance of her neighbors' ideals bends her thoughts to a remote God and away from the women upon whom she relies and who rely on her. Rebekka's newfound hardline Christianity undercuts the utopian potential of her early friendship with Lina.

By bearing a child and renaming herself "Complete," Sorrow draws a stark contrast with Rebekka's Anabaptist conversion to and concomitant embrace of what Morrison highlights as both ecclesiastical and social separatistism. Though Rebekka initially rejected the Anabaptists because they refused to baptize Patrician, her smallpox infection and Jacob's death inspire an evidently unfortunate turn to an exclusionary religious practice: "on her knees," the book details, "her head bowed, [Rebekka] seemed completely alone in the world. Sorrow understood that servants, however many, *would not make a difference*. Somehow their care and devotion did not matter to her. So Mistress had no one—no one at all. Except the One she was whispering to: 'Thank you my Lord for the saving grace you have shown me'" (*A Mercy* 129–30, emphasis added). Perceiving

herself alone, Rebekka's bindings to the Vaark plantation women re-form into the bonds of race-based hierarchy, replacing the communal womanhood forged while Jacob was alive but largely absent. "There had always been tangled strings among them," the narrator explains, detailing Rebekka's change. "Now they were cut. Each woman embargoed herself; spun her own web of thoughts unavailable to anyone else" (133–34).[12] Individualism here is given as a post-lapsarian condition, but the Fall into disconnection comes from embracing a commitment to self over others. By whispering to "the One," Rebekka abjures the many; epistemologically speaking, this also translates others to Others and reduces all to same, at least in the sense of claimants to an ideal: no longer would her servants "make a difference."[13] Sorrow, on the other hand, cannot see herself as "Complete" until she becomes plural by identifying as the mother of her own child.

Though fictional, the Vaark plantation stages an alternative, multiethnic, and un-raced America that could have been. Rather than seeking a salve for her suffering in the immediate community surrounding her, Rebekka turns to a highly exclusionary narrative of idealist meaning, one that delivers fulfillment only after—not in—this lifetime. Noting Morrison's position in *Playing in the Dark* that black Africanist characteristics provide an Other against which whiteness both appears and disappears as a naturalized norm of American national identity, we can then see why *Beloved* evinces such skepticism toward writing the self into discourse even though it is a written work. *A Mercy* revisits this problem by returning to the historical conditions under which a black voice might have articulated itself right at the moment of its exclusion and objectification within Anglo-European discourse.

Again, the immediacy of Florens's writing in the present tense serves to remind us of the discursive legacy that continues to utilize black Africanist characteristics as a staging ground for the apophatic invisibility of whiteness in America. However, it also provides a space wherein readers might recognize these processes at work within their own subjectivities and make the kind of recognitions that can counter the naturalized assumptions lurking within them. Though Florens may never know her mother's actions were an act of mercy rather than abandonment, we can see in Morrison's reimagination of America's origins the sacrifices forced from early Americans—especially black Africans and American Indians—as not tangential but rather central to the formation of multiple national characters. In this vision, the Separatists inaugurate only one strain of US selfhood. Additionally, we might imagine not one, but

plural American public spheres that admit plural notions of what it means to be a modern American and in which differences and dependencies complement rather than contest American selves.

CONCLUSION

TITUBA, HOPEFULLY, UNKNOWABLE

"Remember me. Remember me," pleas Louisa Hall's fictional Mary Bradford, one of seven characters who narrate her 2015 novel, *Speak*. Hall's haunting tale of an artificial intelligence that leads to a Salemesque affliction includes Bradford's journal as edited by Ruth Dettman. Dettman's edition, and thus her career, flourishes in the context of post-1970s feminism, though Dettman confesses unease with that fact. "I don't particularly relish the idea of Mary getting included [in the canon] merely because she's a woman," Ruth confesses in a letter to her estranged ex-husband. Continuing in a sentence fragment, Ruth explains further: "Getting read only for what she says about being female in colonial times, as if she could speak only to that topic." After years of teaching, the pitfalls of such study have become obvious to Ruth: "students barely skim what she wrote, then pen inflamed essays about marginalization, and amid all the shouting, she still falls silent. Her burial plot is still empty in the old Puritan graveyard, bare beside [her husband] Whittier's enormous rock." This saddens Ruth because she "can't help thinking this kind of inclusion isn't much more than an acceptable new brand of dehumanization" (226). Hall's Puritan girl exhibits a brave humanity, one not terribly unfamiliar in its 1663 context, and rendered plausible by the novel's daring prose. Mary Bradford's scientific mind and self-possessed indignation in the face of an arranged marriage recalls memorable colonial women such as Anne Bradstreet, Anne Hutchinson, and Sarah Kemble Knight.

And yet, this Bradford is entirely fictional, a new voice in the growing pantheon of imagined Puritan histories. Hall's remarkable story plots the rise of artificial intelligence across four distinctive historical moments, including Alan Touring's homophobic mid century; the culture war era of the late 1960s through the early 1980s; and a dystopian 2040. It all begins, though, with an Englishwoman fleeing the political crisis caused by the restoration of the British monarchy under Charles II. Hall's modern America begins as an invented

Bradford sets out for New England. If we read her carefully, *Speak* implies, we can learn about much more than just the colonial past. Remembering Mary Bradford as a specific person, and not as a representation of a generalized consciousness, careful readers can move beyond clichés and platitudes into a new kind of conversation, whatever that may be. Ruth does not speculate, perhaps to give her readers more space to think through the matter on their own.

Similarly invoking the Salem Panic, Toni Morrison sets *A Mercy* on the eve of the colonies' most notorious crisis, one of many moments in New English history where a person's nascent racial difference posed a threat to the paradoxically individualist congregations throughout New England. And so my analysis will return us to Salem, where this book's introduction began, to suggest how a Morrisonian consciousness of New England's pre-Puritan historiography offers a distinct perspective from which to view Salem, and thus America, in simultaneously antique and avant garde terms. Jill Lepore argues that an uncertainty regarding emerging racial categories underlay King Philip's War, the 1676 English conflict with a number of nearby Native American peoples that, among other things, led to Mary Rowlandson's abduction. Lepore's *The Name of War* traces colonial New Englanders' identity crisis in the late 1670s: she claims they saw themselves as the Englishmen whom they hoped to reform, but also *not* as the Englishmen they left behind—both at the same time. Neither did the settler-colonists ally with the Indians, whose alien notions about property and propriety the New Englanders' failed to accept as human enough to warrant land stewardship. Lepore thus contends American identity was (and still is) produced by this process of negations. Positive identity formation occurs, for her, in the emergence of the category of whiteness, which is produced through ownership of material things like houses and cattle. Tracy Fessenden also contends that English interiority extended through property to a presumed transcendent realm, as English colonization by radically reformed Christians worked to make the heavenly commensurate with the earthly. That is to say, domestication of the land was a manner of preparing the earth for alignment with God's heavenly kingdom, if not of effecting that alignment outright.

Mary Beth Norton sees King Philip's War as a contributing factor to the Salem Witch Panic, leaving in its wake a fearful population eager to control what (racial) threats it could. The indigenous population, however, was beyond the reach of the colonists' control. Such a fear of absent control still haunts American identity, manifested in an illusory normative whiteness that cannot state outright what it is, so instead defines that identity by the things it is

not. Salem tourism sets Tituba apart from New English Americanness; Morrison's Florens, in being made black and individual by colonialist discourse, also demonstrates how colonial elites inaugurated and controlled the process by which the terms of identity formation were set. Positivist assertions that Tituba was a discernibly black woman work in much the same way that Luce Irigaray describes the role of the feminine in phallogocentrist reason.[1] Her blackness is "other" within American discourses about race, a negative to whiteness that ultimately made the people so classified only three-fifths of a person for a devastating period of time.

Being "black" and non-English in origin allows modern Salem's Tituba to function as a staging ground against which the normative American self is produced as white, male, and (to a degree, if even adopted) English. Conceived outside the knowable categories of race, in contrast Tituba forms too radical an alterity for this process: the unknowability of her race would explode the sequence whereby normative Americanness presumes a New English essence in the present. For, indeed, if the Other is not singular, what must its correlate be? And if the Other cannot be rendered in greater or lesser degrees of sameness to an Idea, how does the Other "differ," and from what? Not knowing the ethnic and racial elements of Tituba—like not understanding the blackness and selfness of Florens—underscores the fact that a fundamentally different order structured the seventeenth century, an epistemology as foreign to the modern American as is Tituba herself.[2] The correlate of an unknown Tituba is an unknowable Puritan.

Too few heed Hall's plea to remember women such as Tituba as herself, though. The tragedy of modern Salem is that it neither lauds nor mourns the loss of Tituba to history, when it should do both. Visitors are encouraged to buy one plausible claim out of several, one that is more fictional than factual. Despite its flaws, which I enumerated in this book's introduction, the city's Tercentennial Memorial does have one redeeming quality. It is one of the only attractions that fails to mention Tituba, leaving this unknowable and remarkable figure unrepresented. Only the memorial lets her real, underracialized (and thus potentially raceless) identity subtend the victims' identities; only in the memorial is she the figure of an American identity not yet (nor ever to be) reified into the artificial construct of a black slave, which the tourist industry relies upon to prop up the production of an American-as-English identity.

The tension crystallized in efforts to identify Tituba's race offers a specific and concrete example of a more diffuse phenomenon located in many

contemporary American novels. These twentieth- and twenty-first-century writers continually contest the meaning of America's "Puritan tradition." While politicians invoke the origin narrative to generate the illusion of national consensus regarding the terms of Americanness, these writers reenergize the manifold differences that marked New England's transition from several colonies to the core of a single nation. Rather than rejecting the charge excited by New England's mythologized past, they take the matter and make it their own, carefully redeploying the forms and facts of that history to offer an alternate, equally plausible story to set upon a hill.

As the tourist enters the Salem Witch Museum, she turns her back on Roger Conant's statue. She therefore cannot read his words as inscribed at the base of his bronze reproduction. She can ignore, or forget, or reinterpret Conant's belief that God's all-determining providence spared this colony from oblivion, to serve as a model society for others to emulate. She is not required to consider the supreme fiction that Conant believed: that his people were elected above all others to serve as God's representatives in this world. Nor is a visitor encouraged to remember that Tituba, as either African or Indian or a combination of the two, would not have met the standards of personhood as they were being discursively produced within European laws and philosophies of the place and time.

Entering the Salem Witch Museum, the tourist's gaze turns in the opposite direction from Conant's. Whether she sees there the past as "is" (in the static sense of being) or the active production of a past to suit the present—whether she sees the depthlessness of the mirror that purports to reflect America's originary self—has to do with her awareness of how history makes the past into something knowable. I have presented here readings of some post-World War II novels that, in combination, offer a (re)user's guide to America's settled Puritan past, a body of writing that does not simply point out the problems with popular historical perception but enters into the contest for the meaning of "Puritan" history, to resist a pernicious, race-based nationalism that continues to predominate in popular and political discourses about the past. If the myth of Puritanism is to remain the story upon a hill—and it appears it will—then the teller has a stake in whether that tale is a foundation for inclusion or exclusion. Will we remember Mary Bradford as Mary Bradford, both an iconic pilgrim and her own mythical Puritan, as Hall's novel explicitly states and tacitly implies? Will we remember William Bradford as a Pilgrim and not a Puritan, recalling how the Puritan category subsumes and suppresses so much?

The religious, political, and philosophical beliefs of New England's colonists were not uniform and should not be seen as such now. Morrison's *A Mercy* may point the way forward: she may help us see anew the invented northeastern New World landscape in its antique borderless reality. We may unsettle "Puritans" back into the complex, heterogeneous group that varied widely within and across historical periods. And we may behold a "New England Mind" by acknowledging historically suppressed connotations in the language of its consciousness, so that the forms and diction of both in- and out-group thinkers invite new interpretations and understandings. Surely America's fiction writers, as well as its many ardent scholars, have a long hill to climb in that process. Nevertheless, I submit that the journey is well under way and will continue for decades to come.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. See especially Lepore, *In the Name of War*; Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*; and Babb, *E. Pluribus Unum?*

2. See Franchot, especially chapter 1.

3. "Thanatourism," a term borrowing its root from the Greek word for "death," comprises a subcategory of what Bristow and Newman call "fright tourism," also known as "dark tourism."

4. An incomplete list of attractions that trade on Salem's fright-tourism reputation include: the Salem Witch Museum; the Witch Dungeon Museum; the Witch History Museum; Salem Witch Village; the Witch House; the Salem Wax Museum of Witches and Seafarers; Spellbound Museum (including Spellbound's Haunted Parlor); Frankenstein's Laboratory; Count Orlok's Nightmare Gallery; and Lizzie Borden's Forty Whacks Museum. This is to say nothing of the connections to piracy that offer similar thrills to the visitor.

5. For more on this, see Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*; Leprore, *The Name of War*, especially chapter 3; and Spanos, *American Exceptionalism*, especially 188–98.

6. Deleuze argues that Platonic idealism relies upon a kind of circular reasoning in order to ground the model as "essence." In providing the foundation for judging the quality of a claimant's case for association with or identification by an ideal, nationalist discourses place some people closer to and others further away from the ideal form: in this case, the ideal is Americanness. Here we can see how certain politicians can identify some Americans as "real Americans," rhetoric which often emanates from white evangelicals targeting anglophone, Protestant, "hard working," individualist voters with whom they seek affinity. By positing that others make inferior claims to an ideal, the in-group can claim essential kinship. Ultimately, Deleuze demonstrates that identifying simulacra exposes this series as merely discursive and thus that essences exist only as elements of language, affirming, for Deleuze, that difference as such underlies all things. Chaos is elemental, and essence follows from rather than precedes an ordered understanding of the world.

Deleuze does not claim to innovate this critique of essence: his sense of the meaning of terms reworks an objection to essence raised by Nietzsche. For both, words are metaphors, and metaphors work by insisting that unlike things are actually identical things. For Nietzsche, as for Deleuze, identity is the product of such metaphors and such metaphors also require the exclusion of other terms from claims to possessing or sharing in the essence

of an idea (Nietzsche 117). Deleuze follows this conclusion to its fullest extension: that the being of the world is chaos and order is imposed in the form of appearance by the operation of representation. The simulacrum, far from being the degraded copy as Baudrillard so famously pronounced it, is that which reveals the process through which the succession of idea and copy rely upon one another in the discursive production of essence on "spiritual" grounds. Spiritualized representation, Deleuze contends, comprises the Platonic transcendent realm that becomes the heaven promised by many sects of Christianity (*Logic* 259).

7. Although he is a Southerner, Gingrich embraces New English priority in his conception of America's origins; so much is evident in his documentary video, *The City upon a Hill: The Spirit of American Exceptionalism*.

8. I contrast Morgan's *The Puritan Dilemma* with his essay "Wider Context" to chart the "city upon a hill" meme's rise in American thought elsewhere. See "With Names, No Coincidence."

9. Mark L. Sargent locates the origins of the consensus myth in debates about the Pilgrims' ties to the proper form of American governance around the Revolutionary era. See "The Conservative Covenant: The Rise of the Mayflower Compact in American Myth."

10. Though Franchot selects the phrase "attraction of repulsion" as the title for chapter 10 of *Roads to Rome*, it succinctly sums up a great deal of the book's intellectual energy.

11. Following Talal Asad, Fenton also adopts this position.

12. Several guided tours contended when I visited between 2005 and 2010 that the site of the actual hangings is now located by a Walgreen's drug store. Turns out, folk wisdom proved correct: see "Researchers Confirm Site of Hangings."

13. Corwin was not an accused witch but in fact one of the magistrates overseeing the trials. Corwin's home has been known as "the Old Witch House" since the mid-nineteenth century, and prior to that was styled the "Williams house." It seems that before the earliest boom of tourism to hit Salem, local residents preferred the unsubstantiated connection to Roger Williams than to that of the witch judge. See Glencarella.

14. A word on the tour at the Witch Dungeon Museum: the history is actually quite accurate, and their explanation of the causes of the witch hysteria, though somewhat narrow, remains consistent with several reputable sources, most notably Boyer and Nissenbaum. The problem with it, aside from the almost comical signage in the front, is that what is supposed to be a re-creation of the material conditions of imprisonment are wildly inaccurate, as the guide herself explained in my three visits there. Most notably, all the mannequins are behind walls and bars, despite the guide's immediate explanation that the prison had nowhere near that kind of infrastructure. The subsequent stops on the tour have nothing to do with the so-called dungeon; it devolves into a boilerplate diorama narrative of the Salem crisis.

15. I might point out here that none of the attractions are actually frightening, although they may have been at one time. Their aesthetics are more consistent with horror-related media of the late 1970s. Watching preteen children giggle through so many of the presentations led me to conclude that the aesthetics of fear that Salem subscribes to are simply outdated, making what was once a perhaps fearful place now more kitschy than anything else. Interestingly, despite the documented dissatisfaction with this style (see

Wasserman), the mode continues to predominate. The Witch History Museum was built in the early 2000s and is, like so many of the other attractions in Salem, a series of unrealistic dioramas of the wax-museum sort.

16. After being directed to the theme-park quality of the Salem tourist experience by my research assistant, Rose Woodbury, I later learned that the producers of the documentary *Witch City* refer to it as "a sort of witchcraft Disneyland."

17. I appeal here to Hayden White's definition of history, as offered in *The Content of The Form*. See especially page 5.

18. Doubtlessly Plimouth Plantation—a "living history" re-creation of the Plymouth Colony in 1627—promotes a sense that America's origins issue from the *Mayflower*. Its current Web site boasts that a visit to Plimouth introduces its visitor to "the voyage that made a nation." The singular English origin narrative is not unique to Salem; what I contend is unique is the widespread tendency to oscillate between rigorous historical presentation and conveniently pat approximations of the past, which makes the town more "fiction" than "history." Moreover, Plimouth (which is affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution) also houses a "living village" of Wampanoag people. In it, visitors can observe elements of traditional Wampanoag life while learning about contemporary conditions of the Wampanoag people.

19. The historiography on Tituba's "race" fascinates. In 1974, Chadwick Hansen published "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, Or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro." Hansen, confident that Tituba was a Carib Indian (1), was wrong. At least, it would seem that he was, as Bernard Rosenthal compellingly established in 1998. Later, in 2000, Veta Smith Parker produced a very helpful historiography in the *Journal of Black Studies*. I would be remiss if I failed to mention that Maryse Condé makes good sport of mocking academics' obsession with Tituba's race in her hilarious and controversial *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. For more on her terrific book, see Moss's disapproving "Postmodernizing the Salem Witch Craze."

20. Tituba's blackness, usually creolized by Caribbean dress, is affirmed in the Salem Witch Museum, the Salem Witch Dungeon Museum, the Salem Witch Trials Museum, and the Salem Wax Museum of Witches and Seafarers. Although she is frequently called "Tituba Indian" in the remaining documents from the time, that name may have come from her marriage to a Native man named John Indian. The attribution of blackness to her likely entered historiography via Longfellow's odd closet drama *Giles Corey of the Salem Farms*, which combined her Africanist race with an unrepentant devotion to witchery in order to metaphorically represent anti-Christian evil.

CHAPTER 1

1. On this point, see Fessenden and Hutson, to name just two.

2. See Michael P. Winship, "Were There Any Puritans in New England?"

3. Even so, by the mid-seventeenth century, congregations did turn to synods to sort out some problems, as evidenced by the "half-way compromise." See Pope, *The Half-Way Controversy*.

4. Like almost all attempts at approximating "Puritan" belief—and hence why I find

the label to obscure more than it reveals—the TULIP mnemonic itself has a fascinating and troubled history. Kenneth J. Stewart argues that, as I claim about the name "Puritan," the TULIP device is also a retrodiction and therefore an insensitive approach to the canons of Dort. See "The Points of Calvinism: Retrospect and Prospect."

5. Such is obviously the case in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*: but, as Robert Daly rightly points out, typology is abundant in William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*. See Robert Daly, "William Bradford's Vision of History." The best understanding of Mather's biographical/historical method I know of is given in Sacvan Bercovitch's *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*.

6. Naumkeag, the original destination for Winthrop's "Great Migration," was named "Salem," a shortening of "Jerusalem." This group eventually relocated to Boston for geographical reasons.

7. See Wood, "Rhetoric and Reality" (6); see also Sargent, "Rise of the Mayflower Compact."

8. Zuckerman challenges idealistic narratives about New English democracy in eighteenth-century town governance: see "The Social Context of Democracy in Massachusetts," wherein he argues New English towns extended the right to vote beyond church membership to quell dissent. The appearance of consensus, however, does not necessarily ensure the actual existence of consensus, as I discuss in regard to Anne Hutchinson.

9. Though unscientific, a keyword search of the term "Puritan" in the online database *American Periodical Series* (ProQuest) yields an enormous spike in citations of the term in American periodicals beginning in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and fairly consistent growth through 1849. The next big spike appears between 1890 and 1910, not surprisingly coincidental with a period of heavy immigration.

10. On the "forgetting" of slavery in the colonial and American North, see Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, especially 1–49. Both Cotton Mather and Samuel Sewall cited the Bible to argue against the slave trade. As Melish indicates, however, they were less direct in their critiques of slave ownership, possibly fearing backlash from a rather large number of slave owners who would suffer materially from the immediate emancipation of all slaves.

11. For an excellent summation of typology in New England, see Bercovitch, "The Typology of America's Mission," and Crowell, "Perry Miller and Typology." See Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, chapter 1, on the secularizing effect such commingling had on Protestant presumptions and values.

12. Bailey does not, however, eschew using such an imprecise term. He, like many others, simply refuses the capital *p* and proceeds to use the term some one hundred times in the book's one hundred thirty-nine pages. One ought not fault Bailey here: the book is a marvelous addition to our understanding of colonial New England's history, and he trades in the currency of his discipline. Nevertheless his usage implies a kind of Puritan monism which binds persons across differing groups and times.

13. A particularly illustrative example appears in Joanne Pope Melish's otherwise solid book, *Disowning Slavery*, wherein she refers to "Puritan ministers" advancing antislavery arguments as late as 1774 (54). Who she means by "Puritan" is left to inference, though the

context suggests a powerful group of New English preachers, probably Congregationalists. Many of the complications in "Puritan" historiography issue from a cross-disciplinary imprecision.

14. As I discuss in chapter 6, the borders of the early colonies were fluid and highly permeable. Through the first half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch, Swedes, and French all maintained colonies in close proximity to the New English colonies. Though their national leaders were eventually expelled, some colonists remained. Moreover, Roger Williams was famously accepting of Jews; slavery forcibly relocated Muslims and other Africanist spiritualties to the New World; and the boundaries between Congregationalist and Anglican were complicated by the fact that many dissenters saw themselves as proper members of the Church of England who were simply advocating reform.

15. While writers of fiction and poetry largely eschewed the Puritans as a subject of consideration (Robert Lowell being a notable exception), many influential historians—like the aforementioned Perry Miller—turned energetic attention to colonial New England, resulting in the discipline of American studies. This return to the seventeenth century was pivotal in restoring the presence of Puritanism in popular discussions of America's origins. For an excellent distillation of the development of American studies in the early twentieth century, see Gura, "Puritan Origins."

CHAPTER 2

1. This makes sense especially in light of the fact that Gaddis attended Harvard during Perry Miller's tenure, where—even if he did not study with the pioneering scholar of American Studies—the resurgent interest in American Puritanism as an entity abounded.

2. Jonathan Franzen drew renewed attention to William Gaddis (and yet more controversial attention to himself) in a now-famous essay titled "Mr. Difficult: William Gaddis and the Problem of Hard-to-Read Books." I would be remiss if I did not draw your attention to Ben Marcus's riposte, "Why Experimental Fiction Threatens to Destroy Publishing, Jonathan Franzen, and Life as We Know It: A Correction." This exchange became a signal moment in the revitalization of Gaddis's reputation as a twentieth-century literary giant.

3. For more on Hathorne and the Salem Witch Trials, see Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*.

4. Hawthorne changed the Hathorne spelling in order to disguise a family history of which he was deeply ashamed. His contempt is evident in the story "Main-Street."

5. Gaddis refuses quotation marks in citing his characters' direct discourse; rather, he notes the opening of direct utterances with em-dashes and does not signify the end of a given statement. Consequently, it can be downright impossible to discern the distinction between characters' speaking and free indirect narration.

Both Gaddis and Pynchon frequently use ellipses in their novels, so I have enclosed editorially inserted ellipses in brackets to distinguish editorial changes from authors' styles.

6. In a later essay, Gaddis states:

> In his lecture "What Pragmatism Means," the pragmatist, said James, "turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed

> systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards actions and towards power. . . . You must," he insisted—bypassing "God" as a verbal solution—"bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience."
>
> "Pragmatism, says Hofstadter, "was absorbed into the national culture when men were thinking of manipulation and control." . . . In a nation ravenous for progress in the shape of material goods, the logical outcome was the concept of mass production" (Gaddis, *Rush* 48–49).

7. See also this chapter's epigraph: Gaddis constantly returns to the idea that allowing public taste to judge the merit of a work of art is an inhibition to greatness. While the theme is readily apparent in *The Recognitions*, it reaches its fullest expression, complete with philosophical justification and countless examples of its detrimental impact on the work of art, in *Agapē Agape*.

8. "In some instances, even, (at least, so those believed, who best appreciated Hilda's power and sensibility,) she had been enabled to execute what the great Master had conceived in his imagination, but had not so perfectly succeeded in putting on canvas;—a result surely not impossible when such depth of sympathy, as she possessed, was assisted by the delicate skill and accuracy of her slender hand" (Hawthorne, *MF* 59).

9. For an extended discussion of typology, see chapter 6.

10. Hawthorne's greatest artists all demonstrate the capacity to bring inanimate material to life. Owen Warland, in "The Artist of the Beautiful," is said to "spiritualize matter"; in "Drowne's Wooden Image," the title character is a woodworker who sculpts mastheads and whose only true work of art leaves a town in disagreement whether they saw its model or the copy itself cross a busy street. I have developed these analyses in "The Eye-ball and the Butterfly."

11. Such a bearing toward the appearance of rectitude over an inward sense of grace contrasts starkly with Marilynne Robinson's idealized version of modern Calvinism, which I explore in this book's fifth chapter.

12. Unlike Wyatt Gwyon's existential crisis in *The Recognitions*, which is a figurative disappearance, Hilda is physically abducted, and for a time actually disappears.

13. See Bently, "Slaves and Fauns," and Tellefsen, "'The Case with My Dear Native Land.'"

14. Nameless fathers are a common theme throughout Gaddis's career. Neither Otto's nor Wyatt's father is named; which brother is the father of Edward Bast in *J R* is never determined, nor is the father of the young tycoon, J R Vansant; Oscar Crease's father is simply identified as "Judge Crease" in *A Frolic of His Own*, to name just a few instances. For the purposes of this chapter, then, I will use "Reverend Gwyon" and "Gwyon" interchangeably, but will only refer to Wyatt as "Wyatt" to avoid confusion.

15. I read Sinisterra's surname as a marvelous joke that sums up the secularized

Protestant values lampooned by Gaddis's novel. As a counterfeiter, Frank would figure the artificial nature of Catholic belief that Protestants often ascribe it; moreover, his name would translate loosely into "evil land," which is what Aunt May and her friends think of the predominantly Catholic southern Europe.

16. This confusion of means with ends, representing a massive shortcoming of the modern era, is more fully apparent in the Mr. Pivner sections of the novel; it is also a concern of chapter 3, which is on *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

17. My thanks also to the William Gaddis Annotations Web page for the reference.

18. Evidently, Phythian-Adams got a fair bit about Mithraism wrong. At the time, however, his was the authoritative text on the subject, and thus Gaddis relied on it as his source. Hence, it makes sense to treat Mithraism as it was understood during *The Recognitions*' composition, rather than as it is understood in the present.

19. Later, Wyatt will turn to Pelagianism for much the same reason.

20. Owing to *The Recognitions*' frequent references to modernist poetry, it bears mentioning that "there would be time" alludes to T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; from there, one need take but one step further to note the notion of cyclical time and ideas of Indian spirituality appearing in *The Waste Land*.

21. As victors so often tell the tales of the past, perhaps the most famous account of Thomas Morton's Merrymount plantation is given in William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647*, 204–10. Morton's own account, widely anthologized, is his *New English Canaan*. The tension and hostility between the dour Separatists at Plymouth and licentious loyalists at Merrymount were later dramatized in Hawthorne's short story "The May-Pole of Merry Mount."

22. Peter was crucified for his beliefs, but insisted that he be so upside down, for his humility would not allow him to suffer his fate in the same position as Jesus.

23. Note that, for Gaddis as well as Hawthorne, the loss of sympathy is a failure to be fully connected to the social world, and is a far worse sin than most Puritan "sins," like drawing and painting.

24. For an explanation of "justification by faith," see chapter 4.

25. "You shall not have other gods before me": Exodus 20:3 (Coogan, n.p.).

26. Calvinism holds that God initially offered man a covenant of works (or law) when granting Adam and Eve freedom of the will. When they broke that promise, God enacted a covenant of faith in Christ, with the imputation and subsequent expiation of sin effected through his crucifixion. Thus, no act of man could induce salvation: it could only be granted by God through no doing of one's own.

27. *The Recognitions*' opinion of the art world is most clearly exemplified by Max's painting "The Soul of the Working Man," which is actually the paint-stained shirt of a working man, framed and displayed and greedily fawned over by the East Village scene.

28. I have argued in "The Eye-Ball and the Butterfly" that Hawthorne celebrates most those works of art that build affective bonds of community. Additionally, I contend Gaddis regards most highly those works of art that defy explication in language and instead create sites of contest and communication between segments of society that too often remained isolated and self-enclosed. See "Power of Babel."

29. Interestingly, these details somewhat recount William Faulkner's deception regarding his "engagement" with World War I. As Joseph Blotner details in *Faulkner: A Biography* (59–67), the young writer faked British citizenship and trained for the RAF in Toronto. He returned to Mississippi at the close of the war, never having seen battle and probably without completing his flight training; nevertheless, he wore a light blue officer's uniform with aviator wings, and affected a limp. Hence, though possibly unintentional, the suggestion that Otto may have plagiarized *The Sound and the Fury* takes on an additional humorous note.

30. This theme will remain with Gaddis throughout the course of his life, recurring as primary concerns in *J R*, *A Frolic of His Own*, and *Agapē Agape*.

31. A veritable treatise on Wyatt's character, the *Imitatio* provides perhaps the most succinct description of his approach: "If you wish to learn and appreciate something worth while, then love to be unknown and considered as nothing. Truly to know and despise self is the best and most perfect counsel. To think of oneself as nothing . . . is the best and most perfect wisdom. . . . All men are frail, but you must admit that none is more frail than yourself" (Kempis 3).

32. For more on the doctrine of grace and the problems of assurance (or "presumption"), see chapter 4.

33. "Months before the boy's birth, [Gwyon] and [Wyatt's mother] Camilla agreed, if it were a son, to name him Stephen; and not until months after their son was born, and Aunt May peremptorily supplied the name Wyatt from somewhere in the Gywon genealogy, did they remember. Or rather, Camilla remembered, and though it might have been a safe choice, for the name's sake of the first Christian martyr, even to Aunt May, neither of them had mentioned it to her, for baptism had already taken place" (*The Recognitions*, 27). It is unclear if Gaddis was aware that Stephen's status as the first martyr (indeed, as martyr at all) is believed to be most likely a popular historical misapprehension, and as such, I shall not go far in explicating this choice in naming. It is nevertheless worth noting that Stephen I's own practice of religion is summed up in a quotation that might serve as an explanation of Wyatt's artistic theory: "No innovation must be introduced, but let that be observed which tradition has handed down" (qtd. in Farmer). It should also be noted that Peter William Koenig provides a brilliant reading of the martyr-saint theme in his essay "Recognizing Gaddis's 'Recognitions.'"

34. Franchot cites William A. Clebsch in grounding her claim that history, understood by the West, begins with Augustinian thought. See 370, note 7.

CHAPTER 3

1. Merrill and Scholl establish one of the most persistent strains in Vonnegut criticism, insisting that the opening chapter represents Vonnegut the man as well as his ethical standpoint. "By intruding into his own tale, Vonnegut contrasts his personal position with that of his protagonist, [Billy Pilgrim]" (146).

2. In revising late-stage drafts of this chapter, I found Hinchcliffe's remarkable reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a revised version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. We arrive at certain shared conclusions and diverge in others: the most noteworthy disagreement is with Hinch-

cliffe's simple identification of English and American conversion narratives, which I find problematic—a matter I discuss in greater depth in the subsequent chapter. A few flaws notwithstanding, this is an excellent essay and required reading on "Puritan" influences in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

3. By the middle of the twentieth century, conflating Plymouth's "Pilgrims" and Massachusetts's "Puritans" was a commonplace discursive move. As discussed in chapter 1, one can debate whether or not identifying the groups as altogether separate justly represents the British colonies in northern North America.

4. Regarding close ties to religious leaders: Mary Rowlandson was a preacher's wife, for instance, and John Williams a preacher himself. Additionally, Increase and Cotton Mather served as amanuenses for many other captivity stories. As to unusual foods: at one point, he eats the syrup he is producing in the Dresden factory, a dietary supplement for pregnant women. With respect to conversion: the American captives are confronted by Howard W. Campell Jr., the American-born Nazi propagandist, and given the opportunity to fight the Soviet Army. Finally, while most abductees escaped or were traded back, a few who recorded their narratives remained members of the abductors' communities.

5. Paradoxically, the worse things were in the world, the better for the Congregationalists' mission. Believing that the physical world was a text to be read for insight into God's intentions for his people, the hardship initially faced by the Pilgrims served as a rallying mechanism: strife meant God was angry, and God's anger meant damnation. Fear of damnation sparked conversion and deep devotion. Conversely, prosperity signified God's pleasure with the elect, and arguably led to "declension." One must be careful to note, however, that economic prosperity was only one of many influences that led to the decline of theocracy in New England.

6. See Rowlandson 63, footnote 12; see also Minter 336, footnote 7. *Ter Amicam* is best translated as "Thy Three-Fold Friend;" however, subsequent revisions have emended the signature to *Per Amicum*: "By a Friend," the meaning most likely intended. Though anonymous, it is now widely accepted that this preface was contributed by Increase Mather, a prominent public figure from one of New England's most influential families.

7. Jemison was born Euro-American, but abducted at a young age and raised a Seneca. Given the opportunity to return to white society, Jemison declined, self-identifying as Seneca. Her story was written by James Seaver in the first person, as though in Jemison's own voice. However, Jemison's husband's narrative—a particularly charged and violent portion of the story—was related by a cousin: "For the life of [Mrs. Jemison's] last husband, we are indebted to her cousin, Mr. George Jemison. . . . The thoughts of [her husband's] deeds, *probably* chilled her old heart, and made her dread to rehearse them" (58, emphasis added). This "probably" elides personal or cultural considerations, like the possibility that Jemison found speaking of the dead either too painful or inappropriate; in any event, Seaver fails to account for George Jemison's potential bias against Mary and her husband. According to Namais's introduction: "Midway through the chapter Seaver's footnote reminds the reader that the material is from George Jemison. Seaver testifies to its accuracy, despite Mrs. Jemison's recounting to him how the alleged George Jemison had cheated her out of her land, and her belief that he was no relation to her whatever" (36). Such pastiche serves as further

evidence of the polyvocality of captivity narratives.

8. For a succinct discussion of "Puritan" historical practices and the "Deuteronomic Formula" see Daly, "William Bradford's Vision of History."

9. Deuteronomy 28 immediately follows the delivery of the commandments to Moses, during the Israelites' forty-year detour in the desert. That personal behavior is directly related to the fate of private self as well as the nation is exemplified by this chapter, and should not be overlooked. The following excerpts are taken from the 1599 Geneva translation of the Bible, a common source for the New English Congregationalists. I have modernized some of the spelling and punctuation for clarity. "(1) If thou shalt obey diligently the voice of the Lord thy God, and observe and do all his commandments, which I command thee this day, then the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth. / (2) And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt obey the voice of the Lord thy God. . . . / (7) The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise against thee, to fall before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and shall flee before thee [many, many] ways. . . . / (9) The Lord shall make thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways, / (10) Then all the people of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon over thee, and they shall be afraid of thee." The chapter also enumerates the many and severe consequences of disobedience—surely a source of cold comfort for Rowlandson, surrounded as she was by people she believed to be heathen idolaters. See chapter 6 on the tradition of typology across generations of American literature.

10. On the anxiety of New Englanders' potential to "go native" as a colony, see Lepore, chapter 1.

11. Samuel Sewall's journals are often read along with Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* as evidence of this shift.

12. For more on New English appreciation of the world, see chapter 5.

13. On this point, Hinchcliffe argues powerfully that Billy ultimately lives a life that mirrors two prominent American evangelicals: Billy Graham and Billy Sunday (192). While I disagree that Billy Pilgrim's withdrawal from optometry represents a bond between his proselytizing for Tralfamadorianism and the crass profiteering of televangelism, Hinchcliffe's argument nevertheless warrants consideration.

14. The Vonnegut-as-humanist emerges as a trend in Merrill and Scholl's "The Requirements of Chaos," then predominates at least through Boon's collection *At Millennium's End*.

15. In one of the novel's funniest and yet most heartbreaking moments (at least for literary scholars), Vonnegut seems to question the efficacy of contemporary fiction to truly interface with ethics in a meaningful way. At one point, in an effort to evangelize the Tralfamadorian view of time, Billy sneaks on to a radio set to engage in a discussion of the future of fiction. The narrator describes the action: "The master of ceremonies asked people to say what they thought the function of the novel might be in society, and one critic said . . . 'to teach the wives of junior executives what to buy next, and how to eat in a French restaurant'" (206).

16. In a personal correspondence, Dr. Cullather confirmed his source for this quota-

tion: "New Government, New Spirit." *Life*, January 19, 1953.

17. John McClure remarks on the misleading perception in much postmodernist theory that secularism has superseded religious thought in Western culture. See his essay, "Postmodern/Post-Secular."

CHAPTER 4

1. A point rarely made in scholarship on *GR*, but properly indicated by Robert Daly in "Burned by the Hangman."

2. Winship convincingly demonstrates the reality of English Puritanism, but he questions the extent to which recognizably English Puritanism survived the transatlantic journey to New England. See "Were There Puritans?"

3. The governing magistrates "perceiv[ed] by the Title Page that the Contents of Book were unsound, and Derogatory" (qtd. in Gura, "Contagion" 475).

4. For the sake of appropriate brevity, I'll forego considerations of the Zone Hereros—particularly Christian and Enzian—in this account of failed epistemologies. Not only does such a discussion warrant far more attention than I can give here, these issues have been treated with due care and dexterity in other venues: for the most thoughtful accounts, see Schaub's *Voice of Ambiguity* and Weisenburger's "End of History." This chapter will also have to overlook Mexico's purely statistical approach (which breaks down with Jessica: witness the gothic hair on his pillow, the overwhelming stream of consciousness in the church, etc.), Pudding's "war as economics," and Pointsman's Absolute Binary, among other, equally reductive systems of understanding the world. Each would serve my purposes, but I find Weissman/Blicero and Pökler's systems most illustrative.

5. "Captain Blicero," so called after the Teutonic name for Death, is Weissmann's code name while stationed at the rocket site. To most outside his home, he is known simply as Weissmann and hence, for the sake of clarity, I will refer to this name throughout.

6. Steven Weisenburger defines the term and its tradition in *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion*.

7. Readers familiar with Pynchon's fictions will recognize this dilemma as perhaps the most salient motific consistency within his first three novels.

8. See Genesis 1:9–10

9. The articulation of conversion generally took the form of presenting to the congregation a prepared narrative account of one's knowledge of God's grace; the congregation would generally approve the account. Women, however, were asked to write out their account, to be read by a male interlocutor. While the practice seems a formality today, it appears to function as a kind of coding device. As noted previously, Congregationalists were a polymorphous and often contentious entity: by creating a somewhat standardized practice of initiation, there was sufficient flexibility to avoid the kind of rote ceremony that characterized New English critiques of the Catholic and Anglican "covenant of works" (as opposed to the Calvinist "covenant of grace"); simultaneously, the form gave a kind of identity to a group that was so internally heterogeneous. In effect, it created a set of people and things visibly New English: hence, I refer to the conversion experience as "Puritan," whereas elsewhere in this chapter I refer to the various "Puritanisms" that mark internal

conflicts and consistencies. Once again, church structure in the earlier years was less in dispute than the particulars of theology: by and large, local churches were given broad autonomy. Even volatile issues like the acceptance of or separation from the Anglican Church were largely set aside in favor of a belief in congregationalism. It was not until the early 1660s, at the beginning stages of a crisis of membership admission policies that would result in the "half-way covenant," that more global structural concerns manifested themselves in interparish discourse. The conversion narrative has a more organic history than the half-way covenant. Two useful sources on the topic of the conversion narrative, among many, include: Morgan, *Visible Saints*, especially 37–73; also, Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative*. Morgan's book is seminal and indispensable for early New English religious studies, while Caldwell's presentation exhaustively updates the debates surrounding the history of the conversion narrative, while providing key insights and a wealth of footnotes for further reading.

10. Common usage at the time would suggest a definition of "parts" here as "intellect" or "intelligence."

11. Spelling modernized. "Troth" is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Online Edition, as both faithfulness and truth. All subsequent definitions are also from this reference, owing to Hooker's English birth and the time in which he wrote.

12. Katje calls Slothrop a pig on 206; Säure calls him a "Yankee pig" on 683.

13. On the Feast of the Transfiguration and "fools," see Weisenburger's *Companion*, 263.

14. In a fascinating parallel, Cotton Mather famously contends that George Burroughs, the leader of the accused witches, was capable of becoming invisible. This ability, Mather asserts, demonstrably proves the former Salem minister's guilt, since invisibility is not possible in "Puritans'" understanding of the world without assistance from supernatural forces. See Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, 77 and 106.

CHAPTER 5

1. Tanner sees Ames's vignettes as the source of the novel's "cultural force," which, she argues, "stems not only from [their] lyrical rendering of quotidian experience but from [their] powerful unveiling of how dying shapes the sensory and psychological dynamics of human perception" (Tanner 228). In a deft analysis grounded in contemporary cognitive science, Tanner contends that the "intensity of Ames's perception" is "benign" but ultimately "terrible" (242), for while it yields the immense pleasure of the physical experience, the acuity of the perception is both prompted by and plagued with the irrepressible consciousness of his imminent death. Thus Tanner sees Ames's life—at least its closing moments—as tortured by the very life it fears losing. She concludes that acknowledging the omnipresence of this fear is important, inasmuch as it facilitates a more insightful conversation about the difficulties facing the aging, and perhaps offers pathways to a better model for coping with "the burden of consciousness in the face of loss" (251).

2. Robinson is more deeply engaged with the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth century in *Gilead*, whereas most of the scholarship available on *Housekeeping* reads Robinson in the context of nineteenth-century American literature and/or gender

issues. Perhaps the most thorough treatment of Robinson's references to nineteenth-century American writing is given in Martha Ravits, but the practice is pervasive. See also, among others, Gardner, Hartshorne, Hedrick, and Mallon.

3. See Mark C. Taylor, *After God*, especially chapter 1. I would also add here that orthodoxy was all but illusory in early American Congregationalism: there is no single "thread of Calvinism" in America or otherwise, but multiple threads. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that Michael Wigglesworth and Edward Taylor are of even like belief, let alone same belief. On the question of orthodoxy, consult Gura's *Glimpse* and Foster's *Long Argument*.

4. This observation must be duly credited to Robert Daly's seminal study, *God's Altar*. In it, Daly argues that Puritan poets saw the world as a mere shadow of the truth that was God's invisible—or transcendent—kingdom. New Englishmen then took earthly splendor to be equally shadowy: therefore, it would follow that God's beauty must be incomprehensibly more impressive.

5. In this chapter, I write about "Puritanism" in the terms offered by Robinson herself. I see hers as an effort to make that term mean something other than the received interpretation in her contemporary context. As for the many historians I discuss in chapter 1, Robinson seems to recognize the term's cultural capital and elects to spend, rather than dispense with it.

6. In chapter 7, I discuss how Charles Johnson identifies the conversion narrative as an originally black African form of writing, as Augustine's *Confessions* can be seen as the inaugural text in the form's history.

7. Dorothy Z. Baker argues that in the *Magnalia*, "the early biographical miniatures of the Puritan forefathers resemble hagiography, designed to create culture heroes of the most prominent of the early settlers for subsequent generations of New English colonists, and Mather hoped that such accounts would remind them of the lofty vision and the sacrifices of the men who founded Plymouth and Massachusetts" (4).

8. I have chosen to set aside Mather in this discussion. Mather's *Paterna* was likewise addressed to his sons—first, he wrote to his boy Increase; after "Creasy's" death, it was then directed to Samuel (my thanks to Robert Daly for directing me to this source). But since Mather holds himself up as *exemplar fide* in the more general sense, comparative study with his autobiography is, by my estimation, less appropriate. Roger Clap also dedicated his autobiography to his children (Shea 112), but his overt assurance of salvation and concomitant harsh judgment of his children's behavior is so far afield from the pattern of self-abasement established by more normative New English voices as to render his autobiographical letters antithetical to the practice as identified by Baker, Colacurico, Watkins, and others.

9. For further relevant Bradstreet poetry, see "In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet"; "In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Anne Bradstreet"; and "On My Dear Grandchild Simon Bradstreet." Each poem follows the same track: great suffering at the loss of a child; justifying the loss through the will of God; and then (markedly tepid, to my eye) celebration of the child's exalted status in heaven. Taylor's "On Wedlock and the Death of Children" is a notably more nuanced expression of an otherwise similar sentiment.

10. My thanks to Justin St. Clair, whose research into Thomas Pynchon reminded me of this ocular phenomenon.

11. I refer to the famous imagery: "the God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours" (Edwards, "Sinners" 97–98).

12. See especially *Institutes* I.v.9: "the knowledge of God which we are invited to cultivate is not that which, resting satisfied with empty speculation, only flutters in the brain, but a knowledge which will prove substantial and fruitful wherever it is duly perceived, and rooted in the heart."

13. The theme of the westward expansion of New England values to the Midwest was highlighted in Robinson's lecture delivered at Amherst College and published as "A Great Amnesia" in the May 2008 issue of *Harper's*.

14. Betty Mensch's review-essay, "Jonathan Edwards, *Gilead*, and the problem of 'Tradition,'" does a superb job of situating the similarities and differences between Ames's and Edwards's theological positions; it need not be redone here.

15. Reading Calvin in this way is not without historical precedent. William Pynchon, the earliest American ancestor to Thomas Pynchon, concluded something very similar in *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption*. An implicit threat to a very tenuous (I now say illusory) sense of orthodoxy as well as a perceived threat to the theocrats' political hegemony prompted an extremely harsh response from the political elite—his book was banned, then all copies were gathered up and burned by the Boston hangman. For more, see Gura, "'The Contagion of Corrupt Opinions' in Puritan Massachusetts: The Case of William Pynchon," and Robert Daly, "Burned by the Hangman: Puritan Agency and the Road Not Taken."

CHAPTER 6

1. See "With Names, No Coincidence."

2. Following Gates, I will differentiate the African American discursive practice of "Signifyin(g)" and "Signification" from the standard English usage (and Euro-American literary-theoretical sense) of "signification" by capitalizing the "S" and, when necessary, bracketing the final "g" with parentheses. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates details a theory of reading African American literature through an operation called Signifyin(g): for him, the kind of signification articulated by Saussure and other theorists of the Western tradition is a process of limitation, of narrowing down meaning through semantic connection, whereas Signifyin(g) allows for the proliferation of meaning through various operations of rhetorical connection (45–51). Gates asserts that Signifyin(g) is always a process of "formal *revision* that is at all points double-voiced" (22, emphasis added). Whitehead's style often features a doubled narrative voice: that is, the text confuses the internal monologue of the protagonist with the free indirect discourse of the heterodiegetic narrator, which allows for a playfully productive plurality of meaning.

3. This quotation comes from the title of Francis J. Bremer's remarkable Winthrop biography.

4. Sloth should be read here in much the same way as Thomas Pynchon refers to it in *Gravity's Rainbow* and "Is it O.K. to be a Luddite?" Rather than laziness, the mortal sin of *acedia* means deliberately turning away from God. This should be understood as a kind of existential depression, a hopelessness due to an absence of faith. In this way, Quinn begins *City of Glass* in a manner akin to Plato's unenlightened man and Augustine's born sinner; Quinn, like Calvin's unregenerate, is blind to the world. The novel traces a dizzying path to a kind of new seeing. This new vision bears many of the qualities of the semiological turn in literary theory. More on Pynchon's acedia appears in chapter 5 of this book.

5. I use both words here with anachronisms fully intended, which is to say that New England in the time that Dark "lived" was neither yet "Puritan" nor "America."

6. The national attitude toward the distinction is less refined. Theodore Roosevelt errs—to a New English mindset, anyhow—when he identifies the Pilgrims as the Puritans in the aforementioned 1907 address to the Plymouth society (see chapter 1 in this book).

7. Winthrop opens his "Model" with: "God almighty in his most wise and holy providence hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity, others mean and in subjection." He later adds: "All men being thus (by divine providence) ranked into two sorts: rich and poor, under the first are comprehended all such as are able to live comfortably by their own means duly improved; and all others are poor" (83).

8. Reagan seems to recapitulate New Englanders like Cotton Mather, whose typological practices saw history as a revelation of foreordained truths, rather than a causal sequence whose outcome is determined by human agency. Moreover, the idea that people of Reagan's generation, more than Mather, saw "Americans" prefigured in "Puritans" is well voiced in Rivett (395).

CHAPTER 7

1. We cannot determine the identity of Florens's father, as her mother is raped after her arrival in the New World. Since she ends up on D'Ortega's farm, Florens is probably equal parts African and Portuguese. I would note, here, that the novel dwells little on her self-perception as a raced person, and far more on the way she is treated because of the way others perceive her in relation to her skin color.

2. *Beloved*'s commitment to an Africanist experimentalism set it apart from Ishmael Reed's black Atlantic "Neo-HooDoo" aesthetic (see Rushdy 117–31) and also from Charles Johnson's south and east Asian philosophizing in *Oxherding Tale* and *Middle Passage*.

3. Arnold Krupat contrasts modern American individualism with alternate, community-based notions of selfhood using the tropes of metonymy and synecdoche. Whereas modern Americans identify as discrete wholes in relation to other discrete wholes, Native persons often self-identified in part-to-whole relationships (Krupat 216). That is to say, American individualism remains marked by what Benjamin calls the "incommensurability of experience," while Africanist and American Indian conceptions of personhood conceived of selves as extensions of their communities, and vice versa.

4. Greene underscores the largely contingent nature of Northern moral exceptionalism with respect to the history of slavery. He details that Northerners did not evidence an abiding resistance to slavery so much as a lesser need for it. The Northern colonies' soil was rocky and did not lend itself to large plantations as in the South; moreover, its long winters left slaves inactive and expensive to maintain during the periods of cold and snow. While certain "Puritan" leaders did agitate against the human trade, nevertheless it remained legal and regulated. Morrison reminds us of the North's indifference to Southern slavery by writing Vaark as a necessary funding stream that propelled D'Ortega's atrocious trafficking.

5. It is worth mentioning that Vaark misuses "Algonquin" in a manner consistent with modern misuses of the term: that is, to refer to Algonquian-speaking peoples as the Algonquin people. While this may suggest that Morrison simply does not possess comprehensive knowledge of the histories of the five hundred-plus peoples that preceded European colonization of the Americas—which mastery I certainly do not myself possess, nor does anyone—it is equally worth considering that Vaark would likely have misused certain appellations in referring to American Indian peoples. The Mohawk people, for instance, did not call themselves Mohawk; their proper name is *Kanien'kehá:ka* ("People of the Flint"). Sorrow, though, is said to have been found in "Mohawk country." Nevertheless, the narrator's method of calling places by their ties to Native peoples rather than their European names serves to affirm indigenous notions of political order over the fixed European ideas of the nation-state that followed them. American Indian peoples would likely have been more familiar with an Africanist political tradition than the European order that shortly thereafter reinscribed the land with its British, Dutch, and French power structures. The novel highlights the political arrangement of the New World as it was in 1690 rather than today's predominant understandings. By extension, the novel admits notions of subjectivity that challenge Western/capitalist ideas of "freedom" as well as the binary opposition of "wild" and "civilized" identity. Indeed, the diversity of American Indians' political and ethnic identities makes "Africanist" plurality a potential outcome of New World cultural contact; the arrangement imposed on it by European colonial forces is, Morrison also reminds us, not a natural but rather a contingent outcome of history.

6. Though some readers are likely to recoil at such a claim, note that in interviews Morrison explains that "every civilization in the world relied on" some form of enslavement (qtd. in Norris, n.p.).

7. Babb's remarkable essay traces the codification of blackness and slavery in post-Bacon's Rebellion Virginia and is an indispensible resource for all scholarship on *A Mercy*. I find, however, her acceptance of Florens's blackness potentially reductive; Florens is more than likely biracial since she is conceived in a rape at the hands of New World slave owners. Should we follow the logic of colonial American racial discourses, Florens's biracial status is not necessarily of mixed "white" and "black" blood, however: it is unlikely that the Anglo-Dutch Vaark would have unquestioningly viewed D'Ortega as "white." Just as the geopolitical boundaries of Morrison's colonial America are fluid, so too is the process of racial fixation.

8. "Individualism" as a term has a complex history. Raymond Williams tells us that the regnant usage in discourses about Americanness appeared first in a translation of Toc-

quville. His etymology, as given in *Keywords*, argues the remarkable shift from "indivisible" to "individual," which stresses "a necessary connection" (161). "The emergence of notions of individuality, in the modern sense, can be related to the break-up of the medieval social, economic and religious order," he contends (163). Protestantism figured initially as a challenge to mediated access to God, which led to a turn in the word's predominant meaning in the seventeenth century. It was not until the nineteenth century, however, that "individualism" as a word (and concept) entered into discourse as "a theory not only of abstract individuals but of the primacy of individual state and interests" (165). I argue that Morrison positions Florens and Blacksmith on differing points on the spectrum of proto-American identity conception.

9. Florens's shoes have already received fair critical treatment. For more, see Montgomery and Waegner.

10. Readers of *Beloved* will recall the fact that Sethe ordered the word "Beloved" inscribed on her daughter's grave stone. The inscription of this one word, as much writing as Sethe was afforded in remembrance of her dead child, seems to change the "crawling already?" baby's name to Beloved sometime after her death. Writing's power to reinscribe a person's identity also takes the form of Schoolteacher's lesson to his sons, which functionally rewrites Sethe into something subhuman, a legacy which scars her forever and arguably prompts her flight from Sweet Home.

11. One might see Equiano's claiming African birth and crossing the Atlantic in a slaver as an extension of a synecdochic worldview in contrast to the naturalized, incommensurable individualism of capitalist Europe. For more on synecdochic selfhood, see the introduction to Murray; for more on the incommensurability of the modern Western self, see Benjmain.

12. It is worth noting that Rebekka succumbs to Anabaptism only after smallpox wipes out the center of her farm's infrastructure, in a move that replays the prevenient weakening of indigenous American tribes prior to Europeans' lasting colonization of the New World.

13. I borrow here from Spivak's notion of epistemic violence as articulated in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" What I wish to explicitly contend is that Morrison imagines colonial America as a space that could have produced a syncretic episteme in contrast to the racialized binary logic that ultimately emerged from the now-dominant "Separatism," a term that connotes both the epistemological and religious/political Anglo-American New England trumpeted by today's nostalgic conservative commentators.

CONCLUSION

1. Though these concepts are central to Luce Irigaray's thinking, see especially "The Power of Discourse in the Subordination of the Feminine."

2. This is not to say that New English colonists harbored progressive visions of inclusiveness on the grounds of skin color; I am simply asserting that modern notions of "race" and "ethnicity" had yet to emerge. A dedicated reader can get a handle on that time—Lepore does a remarkable job of it—but Salem tourism has neither the time nor the motivation to make such distinctions. The past is thus subsumed into the present, and contemporary racial delineations are further naturalized.

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